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**ISSUE
421**

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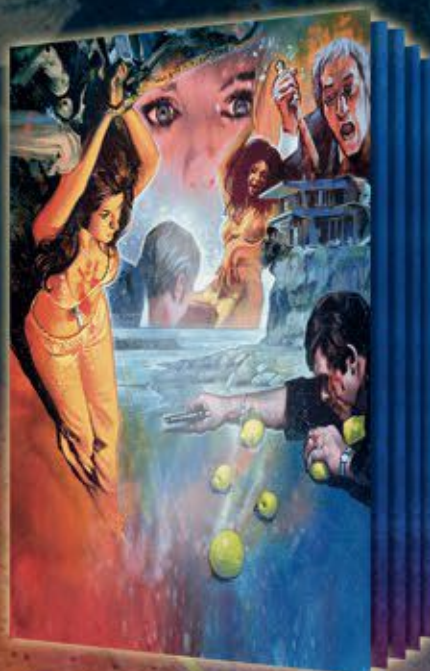
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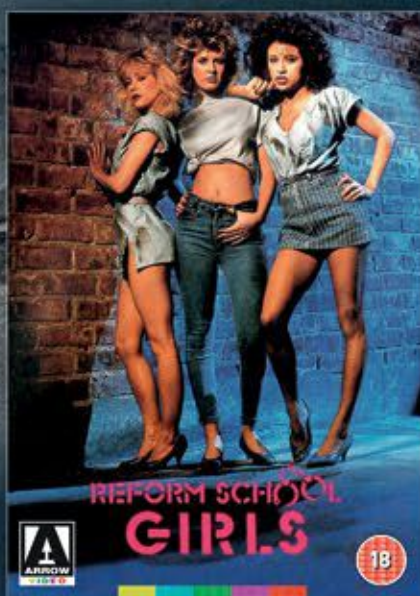
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EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 421!

Remember all of the excitement back in 2009 over **X-Men Origins: Wolverine**? This was to be the first of a series of movies that concentrated on the early adventures of our favourite mutants.

Strangely there was more buzz over seeing the character Deadpool on the big screen than the titular Wovie. A number of disasters crippled the movie, not least the leaking of the entire movie online, sans special effects, but Deadpool was still the biggest misfire. Casting Ryan Reynolds, who appeared to be born to play the part, seemed inspired. Sadly the treatment of the character was appalling, and bore little resemblance to the Merc with the Mouth who had been a fan favourite.

The movie itself is held in contempt by many, and led to the cancellation of the proposed **X-Men Origins: Magneto**, effectively putting an end to these *X-Prequels*.

Happily, it seems that good old Ryan Reynolds never gave up on the character and went so far as to film a trailer, aimed at showing Fox chairman Tom Rothman how cool a Deadpool movie could be if done correctly. Correctly, of course, meaning very violent. Turns out the trailer went down very well indeed and here we are sporting two lovely Deadpool covers to celebrate the **Deadpool** movie that we have all been waiting for. Our (anti-) hero is getting a little cheeky on our regular Newsstand edition, but you also seriously need to check out the collectors' cover. Mark Reihill has really captured the essence of the character. It is a seriously cool piece of art. Whilst inside this lovely mag we look at what we can expect from **Deadpool**, and look back at his greatest comic adventures.

We also manage to take a look back at one of my favourite cult classics – **Beyond the Valley of the Dolls**. I love Russ Meyer, and this was his *magnum opus*. If you have missed out, then I guarantee you will be checking out this flick once you read our retrospective.

We also take a look at **Pride & Prejudice & Zombies**, **Goosebumps**, and celebrate the late Brian Clemens with an exclusive interview with his son. Plus all of your regular columns, and the latest news, and reviews. You can also check out what I thought of a recent little sci-fi film that some of you may have seen over the Christmas period in **It's Only A Movie**.

Until next issue,
Keep watching the weird and wonderful,

Jordan Royce
EDITOR



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FEEDBACK

You can write to STARBURST via snail mail:
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 or email: letters@starburstmagazine.com

STAR

THE HUGE IS OUT THERE

In issue 420, I was reading the 'Brand X' article, and on page 20 there was something strange between Mulders legs, it was HUGE. Now this may not come as a surprise to some people, but I was rather amused.

Mark Sutherland, VIA EMAIL

It was unexpected for us too, but we'd all heard the stories about David. We always sensed there was something between the two of them, and here is the proof, it's huge.



LETTER

THE FONZ AWAKENS

Here's my top 5 of 2015 (taken from a top 15 list also including 'Big Hero 6' & 'Tomorrowland').

- 1.) THE LOBSTER
- 2.) STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS
- 3.) KINGSMAN: SECRET SERVICE
- 4.) TERMINATOR: GENISYS
- 5.) ANT-MAN

I saw STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS five times in one week. My UGC Unlimited card comes in handy (I guess I have too much time on my hands but I don't watch much television) so it's safe to say I love the movie. Hey, it's not every year a STAR WARS movie comes out (until now of course)! They did a very good job at casting likeable actors in the new leads (oh, Daisy Ridley!).

Apparently, the fact that Finn is played by a black actor put some people off. Unbelievable! The original trilogy had an evil white guy in a black suit, the new film has a good black guy in a white suit. I think John Boyega is a perfect fit for the role of Finn (even though the character's name made me expect a SHARKNADO to emerge at one point). By the way: nice to see Max von Sydow where he belongs after starring in STAR WARS "imitators" DUNE and FLASH GORDON. These '80s movie adaptations, based on properties older than STAR WARS (I know), would probably

not have been made without STAR WARS. Excellent actor. I love THE EXORCIST.

I didn't expect much of KINGSMAN: SECRET SERVICE (based on the trailer) but it kicked some serious ass, especially Colin Firth. When cast in a good role he's fantastic; also see WHERE THE TRUTH LIES (2005).

Not in my top 5 but enjoyable anyway: IT FOLLOWS. Many movie critics praise the film for its electronic soundtrack but Belgian critic Michel Follet said this in his weekly movie TV-show: "The real horror is the music."

I'm curious about STARBURST's and its readers' opinion on STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS. I wanted to write a brief letter, but apparently I'm incapable of that (enter winking smiley ... where is it? oh here: ;)).

Btw: I would love to see a crossover between STAR WARS and HAPPY DAYS: STAR WARS: THE FONZ AWAKENS. Eeeeeeeey, only joking. See you next year! Enjoy the holidays!

Darth Kapreles, via EMAIL

If STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS is your #2, and you've seen it 5 times, how many times have you seen your #1 film; THE LOBSTER? If you haven't seen it more times, how did it claw its way to the

top? It did just make it onto the STARBURST top movies of the year as well, it's definitely a film more people need to see!

CANON FODDER

Reading the interesting article in STARBURST 419 regarding the spin off novels, it was a shame to omit the Lando trilogy with a robot that had a different name in the UK edition than in the American one, the Han Solo series and the interestingly weird SPLINTER OF THE MIND'S EYE (which was published hot on the heels of the original STAR WARS (Episode IV: A NEW HOPE) by Alan Dean Foster where Luke ends up with Leia.

Whilst the 'canon' books are fun, the non-canon novels that go off on weird tangents are even more amusing.

Dean Geoghegan, from Coventry

Well it will all be canon from now on, so you will have to resort to Internet forums for non-canon STAR WARS fanfics. We recommend "The Wookiee Gets Lucky", "The Sarlacc Pit and the Pendulum" & The STAR WARS/INDIANA JONES crossover "A New Rope". As for this droid business, it's Bollux.

HELL BENT

This is the first time I've got in contact with you but I am a great fan of your magazine.

I've got in touch mostly to talk about the current state of new DOCTOR WHO which quite frankly has gone right down

the pan and I am fed up with it... just what has happened to the show? I watched the last episode (HELL BENT), and after the first 15-20 minutes or so I just gave up, the whole thing was a complete and utter mess and let-down. I've tried my best to like this series but all Steven Moffat has done since he took over is to drag the series down into the dumps and has made the show almost unwatchable... I really feel sorry for Peter Capaldi as he is brilliant but, like Matt Smith, is being let down by over complicated scripts and boring characters and I for one after seeing the trailer for the Christmas special will for the first time ever not be watching it.... I just can't take this new DOCTOR WHO any more, I mean say what you like about the old series but it is FAR BETTER and I would rather watch stories like Time and the Rani, Time-Flight or Nightmare of Eden than this rubbish put on recently.

I really fear for the future of the show but if anyone has got any sense they will give Steven Moffat the boot and get someone who will make it like it used to be. Thanks for your time.

Robert Slim, via EMAIL

The Doctor knows what's in store for himself next year, he's travelled there already. He knew when he turned on the TV after his Christmas dinner to watch DOCTOR WHO, and EASTENDERS was on instead.



"Members of Starburst staff react to the news that Steven Moffat has stepped down from his job as Doctor Who showrunner."

Winner: Mark Fletcher. Head over to www.starburstmagazine.com to enter this month's caption contest.

STARBURST

NEXT ISSUE: 422 ON SALE FROM FEBRUARY 19TH

THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE
BEST (AND WORST)
OF THIS MONTH'S
MOVIE / TV NEWS



As excitement mounts (at least from those not blinkered to the all-female cast) for Paul Feig's revamp of **Ghostbusters**, we have a snazzy set of character posters and an official shot of the girl's suited and booted for action. With many of the stars from the original 1984 film on board in cameo roles (with Rick Moranis refusing to appear), the quartet of Kristen Wiig, Melissa McCarthy, Leslie Jones, and Kate McKinnon will be kicking spectral ass when the film opens on July 15th.

KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE: KING ARTHUR

Last year's **The Man from U.N.C.L.E.** may not have set cinema cash tills ringing, and now it appears Warner Bros have got cold feet about pitting Guy Ritchie's next opus, based on the Arthurian legend, against such summer blockbuster fare as **Star Trek Beyond**, **Ghostbusters**, and **Finding Dory**. The release date will now be February 17th, 2017. Starring Charlie Hunnam (**Pacific Rim**) as Arthur, the film script (by Joby Harold, writer/director of 2007 thriller **Awake**) is said to follow the soon-to-be King from the back streets of old Londonium, smart-talking his way through life until he finds his destiny in the shape of Excalibur, the sword that proves his worthiness to be monarch. Revenge, angst, and romance with Guinevere (Astrid Bergès-Frisbey) will no doubt ensue. Eric Bana plays Uther Pendragon, Arthur's father, and Jude Law is the big bad, Vortigern. Here's hoping for **Sherlock Holmes**-type success for Ritchie this time around.

DC

As anticipation builds for March's **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice** (expect to see a lot more on that particular movie in next month's issue), the runtime for Zack Snyder's **Man of Steel** follow-up has been revealed. The Ben Affleck and Henry Cavill-starrer will clock in at 151 minutes, putting it at just over two and a half hours in length when the film hits cinemas on March 25th.

Elsewhere in Warner Brothers' DC Cinematic Universe, James Wan's **Aquaman** has brought in David Leslie Johnson to work on the screenplay. As well as currently working with Wan on **The Conjuring 2: The Enfield Poltergeist**, Johnson is best known for his work on the likes of **Orphan** and the God-awful **Wrath of the Titans**. Jason Momoa's Aquaman will debut in the aforementioned **Batman v Superman** before then making some waves of his own when his solo film splashes on to the big screen on July 27th, 2018.

In terms of the DC-based television properties out there, The CW's **Arrow** has made an interesting addition over the past month. Appearing in the fifteenth episode of the show's current fourth season will be Megalyn Echikunwoke's Vixen. What's particularly interesting here is that the actress has voiced Vixen in the character's own animated series on CW Seed. That show, despite being animated, is set in the same shared universe as **Arrow** and **The Flash**, even briefly featuring the vocals of Stephen Amell's Green Arrow and Grant Gustin's Flash. Now Echikunwoke will play that character in a live-action setting. For those not familiar with Vixen, she's a heroine who mimics the abilities of any and all members of the animal kingdom. **Arrow** is currently on its mid-season break but returns to US screens on January 20th, with a UK return to follow shortly after.

Also set in the world of **Arrow** and **The Flash** is the upcoming DC's **Legends of Tomorrow**, set to begin in the US on January 21st and a Sky 1 UK home has now been confirmed. In some fun news, it's been confirmed that Joe Dante, the legendary director of cult classics **Gremlins** and **The Howling**, will be directing the eighth episode of The CW's newest DC-based show. No details are known on what that particular episode will entail, although obviously the main focus will be on the Legends team that consists of Rip Hunter, The Atom, White Canary, Hawkman, Hawkgirl, Firestorm, Captain Cold, and Heat Wave as they battle the deadly threat of immortal uber-villain Vandal Savage.

Moving over to CBS' **Supergirl**, the Melissa Benoist-starring show has brought in two new additions in the form of Italia Ricci and Christopher Showerman. **Chasing Life**'s Ricci will be playing Siobhan Smythe, aka the villainous Silver Banshee, a rogue based on the Irish legend and who has the ability to fly and use an incapacitating death wail. In the series, Smythe will be a work rival of Kara, whilst the Silver Banshee side of the character will torment National City and butt heads with Supergirl. As for Christopher Showerman, best known for playing the lead role in Disney's **George of the Jungle 2**, he's landed the role of Tor. Tor will be based on

DC's Tor-An, a Kryptonian who is part of General Zod's army in the comic book realm. In the show, the character will be a follower of Chris Vance's Non and is expected to become a recurring character throughout the rest of Season One after debuting in the mid-season premiere. Intriguingly enough, Showerman was actually at one point in the frame to play the Big Blue Boy Scout, Superman himself, a decade or so ago before the bodybuilder-turned-actor ultimately lost out on the lead role in **Superman Returns** to Brandon Routh, now seen playing The Atom in The CW's DC realm.

MARVEL

Starting this particular section off with a bang, this past month has seen some potentially massive spoilers out in the ether in regards to **Captain America: Civil War**. It goes without saying, but skip this next paragraph if you'd rather be in the dark when the Sentinel of Liberty returns to the big screen in April.

Right, first up, **Civil War** will open with the funeral of Hayley Atwell's Peggy Carter, but that's not the lowest point for Chris Evans' Steve Rogers, though. After having an almighty tear-up that divides Earth's Mightiest Heroes, Rogers will be killed off at the end of the Russo Brothers' movie. Recent reports claim that, in order to keep fans guessing, *three* different endings have been filmed for **Civil War**; one that sees Sebastian Stan's Bucky Barnes taking on the mantle of Captain America; one that sees Anthony Mackie's Sam Wilson become the new Cap; and one that sees Emily VanCamp's Sharon Carter pick up the iconic shield and take over from Rogers. Of course, we reported months ago that Rogers was likely to bite the bullet during **Civil War**. After all, Evans himself confirmed that **Avengers: Infinity War Part 2** is currently scheduled to be the last film of his present Marvel deal. The actor has a six-film deal (which doesn't include his uber-brief cameo in **Thor: The Dark World**), and **Captain America: Civil War** will mark the fifth movie of this contract. So with only one film of his deal left post-**Civil War**, and with **Infinity War Part 2** the last film of his deal, that suggested a Steve Rogers-shaped hole for **Infinity War Part 1**. And what better way to make a Rogers-shaped hole than to kill him off for a little while before he then makes a triumphant return to help save the day in **Infinity War Part 2**. It's worth noting, however, that Chris Evans has gone on record to say how he's definitely open to extending his Marvel deal for as long as they want him. With obviously no official confirmation, treat this as purely rumour for now, although it certainly does all make a lot of sense. Directed by Anthony and Joe Russo, **Captain America: Civil War** is currently set for an April 29th UK release before a global release follows on May 6th.

Still with us after those **Civil War** spoilers? Good to hear it. Right, well Scott Derrickson's **Doctor Strange** is the next entry in the Marvel Cinematic Universe following the side-choosing **Civil War**. Where the Sorcerer Supreme is concerned, the most interesting story of this past month saw Tom Holland spotted on the set of the currently-shooting flick. Holland, of course, will debut in **Civil War** as the MCU's Spider-Man. There's no confirmation on whether or not his set visit means we can expect a Peter Parker appearance in the Benedict Cumberbatch-starrer, but it's worth noting that Spidey has long sought the advice of the Master of the Mystic Arts in the comic realm, including Strange playing a pivotal role in Parker's life following the comic book **Civil War** arc. Could it be that the Wall-crawler seeks Doc Strange's help after the cinematic **Civil War**? We'll have to wait and see when **Doctor Strange** hits cinemas on November 4th.

In arguably the coolest news of the past month (what can we say, we're big Snake Plissken fans here at Moonbase Alpha), it's been confirmed that the legendary Kurt Russell has had some form of talks to play Star-Lord's father in James Gunn's **Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2**. Gunn first revealed that he wanted Russell to play Peter Quill's daddy dearest before Kurt and his iconic chin then confirmed that there has indeed been talks for him to take the gig. Russell admitted that he hasn't actually seen **Guardians of the Galaxy** yet, but that he'd heard great things about it (because, let's face it, it's totally, totally awesome) and that his plan was to watch the film, read the sequel's script, and then make a decision (fingers, toes and nuts crossed that he agrees to **Guardians 2**). At this stage, however, the mystery over just who the father of Chris Pratt's Quill is has yet to be resolved. All we know is that director Gunn has confirmed that Quill's dad *won't* be the same as in the comic books,



STAR WARS

Everyone knew that **Star Wars: The Force Awakens** was going to be a massive hit, regardless of what people actually thought of the finished product (see our review on page 70 and our esteemed editor's thoughts in **It's Only A Movie** on page 130). That it's smashed all sorts of box office records is a given, so it's good to see rival movie studios have taken the news in good spirits.

Back when **Jurassic World** surprisingly surpassed Marvel's **Avengers Assemble** opening haul, producer Kevin Feige tweeted a mocked-up image to congratulate Universal, Colin Trevorrow, Steven Spielberg and the crew. Now, it's the latter camp's turn to pass the baton to Disney's team, with producer Frank Marshall posting this rather touching tribute to J. J. Abram's accomplishment. At the time of writing, the first of the House of Mouse's ventures to a galaxy far, far away has scored a billion in box office sales worldwide. While it still has a way to go to overtake James Cameron's **Avatar** and **Titanic** at the top of the all-time box office chart, it was the fastest ever film to rake in receipts of \$600 million in the US, three times as fast as its nearest rival, the aforementioned dinosaur flick that took 36 days to reach that milestone.

meaning that J'Son is ruled out. Here's hoping that Kurt Russell ends up as part of **Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2** when it's released on May 5th, 2017.

Keeping things other-worldly, **Thor: Ragnarok** has taken a step closer to landing its 'big bad'. Following on from previous rumours, two-time Oscar-winner Cate Blanchett has been in talks for the film. No details are known on just who the villain of the movie will be, although speculation has suggested that it could well be either Hela, the Norse goddess of Death, or Amora the Enchantress, one of the most powerful magic-based beings in Asgard and beyond. To be

directed by Taika Waititi, **Thor: Ragnarok** is set for a November 3rd, 2017 release.

After debuting in April's **Captain America: Civil War**, Chadwick Boseman's **Black Panther** is set to get his own 2018 solo outing. That film is currently without a director, although the current word is that Ryan Coogler is in talks to helm the movie. Coogler has a lot of buzz around him right now following his work on the latest part of the **Rocky** franchise, the excellent **Creed** (see review on page 73). **Selma**'s Ava DuVernay has previously turned down the **Black Panther** gig due to a difference in vision to Marvel Studios, whilst **Straight Outta Compton**'s F. Gary Gray opted to sign on for **Furious 8** rather than helm the T'Challa tale. At present, **Black Panther**, which will feature Andy Serkis' Ulysses Klaw as the main villain, is set for a February 16th, 2018 arrival.

In some final Marvel Cinematic Universe news, **Ant-Man** and

The Wasp has brought in two new writers in the form of Andrew Barrer and Gabriel Ferrari, both best known for the work on the **Transformers** franchise (but let's not hold that against them). Featuring the returning Paul Rudd and Evangeline Lilly in the titular roles, Peyton Reed's **Ant-Man** follow-up will arrive on July 6th, 2018. And in some non-MCU news, Sony's animated Spider-Man movie, to be written and produced by **The LEGO Movie**'s Phil Lord and Chris Miller, has been pushed back from a July 20th, 2018 release to a December 21st, 2018 release.

Taking things down to the small screen, the only Marvel TV news this month centres on **Iron Fist**. Yes, as in the one and the same **Iron Fist** that was supposedly at risk of getting shelved before it even began. The Netflix-exclusive show has brought in Scott Buck as its showrunner and executive producer. Buck is best known for working on the likes of **Six Feet Under**, **Rome**, and for serving as showrunner on the final four seasons of **Dexter**. Despite not having found its lead at this stage, **Iron Fist** will feature Danny Rand returning to New York City after being AWOL for years. With his kung-fu skills and the power of the magical Iron First, Rand will battle the dastardly and dirty criminal element that's taking over NYC. With **Daredevil** and **Jessica Jones** now available on Netflix, the next new Marvel series to arrive will be **Luke Cage** later this year and then **Iron Fist** next year. Before that, however, will be Season Two of **Daredevil** (expected in March if reports are true), and all four of these heroes will be coming together for the **Defenders** mini-series.

horrorchannel

A round-up of what not to miss this month on Horror Channel...

JANUARY 22ND - TEXAS CHAINSAW (2013)

While not a complete success, this posthumous sequel to Tobe Hooper's 1974 classic has some interesting moments and is a fun distraction for the gloomy post-Christmas nights. Watch out for Gunnar Hansen and Marilyn Burns from the original movie, both of whom have since passed away, as well as the original Grandpa, John Dugan.

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JANUARY 24TH - AMERICAN PSYCHO (2000)

Before he was the Caped Crusader and John Connor, Christian Bale played the epitome of 'yuppie' extreme, Bret Easton Ellis' Patrick Bateman. Shocking, terrifying, gory, and hilarious, Mary Harron's adaptation of the bestseller is unmissable, and proof that Huey Lewis and the News are not just for time travellers.

+++

JANUARY 29TH - DR TERROR'S HOUSE OF HORRORS (1965)

The film that kicked off Amicus studio's run of fantastic anthology movies. Directed by the celebrated Freddie Francis (who was behind the lens of several Hammer films, as well as David Lynch's **The Elephant Man**), this is a star-studded chill-filled affair. Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, Donald Sutherland, and Michael Gough rub shoulders with the less-likely horror icons Roy Castle and Alan 'Fluff' Freeman.

+++

JANUARY 31ST - TO THE DEVIL A DAUGHTER (1976)

The last film made by the mighty Hammer Films before they descended to the small screen for the brilliant **House of Horror** series. Christopher Lee is at his menacing best as the head of a group of Satanists. Richard Widmark attempts to save Nastassja Kinski from becoming a sacrifice. Based on a novel by Dennis Wheatley, it's a fitting swan song for the studio.

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FEBRUARY 14TH - THE MIST (2007)

Love might be in the air, but for the residents of this small town, survival is the name of the game when they become trapped in a supermarket under siege from creatures hidden in the imposing fog. Based on a Stephen King novel, this is a modern classic directed by Frank Darabont, who was clearly taken by many of the actors, as he used them when he started **The Walking Dead**. We defy anyone not to be effected by that ending!

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Classic **Doctor Who** highlights the adventures of Fifth Doctor Peter Davison, with **Kinda**, **Frontios**, and **Resurrection of the Daleks**. Colin Baker's Sixth has to contend with **Attack of the Cybermen** and **The Mark of the Rani**. There's also another chance to catch both Linda Carter's **Wonder Woman** and Gena Lee Nolin's **Sheena** from the very beginning.

Horror Channel is available on SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138 and TalkTalk 487.

INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE

While the promotional juggernaut of the sequel gains pace, the film's viral marketing broke the news of Will Smith's **ID4** character Steve Hiller's demise, answering why the hero was nowhere to be seen when the aliens strike back. Of course, we all know it was because Smith didn't want to reprise the role that made him one of the biggest Hollywood stars, but the official line is Hiller died testing a military aircraft. Smith has addressed this himself while promoting his latest flick, American Football drama **Concussion**. "It was terrible when I found out my character died," he said, adding that he had spoken to director Roland Emmerich about the situation. "I was working on **Suicide Squad** during that time. Roland and I had talked about it. The trailer looks really cool. I'm going to be sitting around with tears in my eyes when that one comes out."

Independence Day: Resurgence opens in the UK on June 26th.

AND FINALLY...

Despite promising **Halloween Returns**, Dimension Films has lost the rights to the series, essentially killing the project. The property has now returned to Miramax, who are set to open bidding to other studios who want a crack at bringing Michael Myers back to the big screen. No doubt in yet another reboot rather than a promised continuation of John Carpenter's original 1978 version (and its sequel).

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More news on Ridley Scott's **Alien: Covenant**, with the film's costume designer Janty Yates revealing that the story will take place ten years after **Prometheus**, which we can assume will be the length of time taken for David (Michael Fassbender) and Elizabeth Shaw (Noomi Rapace) to return to Earth. The main focus will be on newer characters, including the recently-cast Katherine Waterston, who will be captaining the starship Covenant. The film is scheduled to be released on October 6th, 2017.

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Rumours abound that Christoph Waltz - recently seen telling bedtime stories to cockwomble James Corden in that annoying cinema ad - may return as (spoiler alert) Blofeld for another two James Bond movies following his turn in **Spectre**. Apparently, the proviso is that Daniel Craig returns too. Since he'd already stated his lack of interest in playing 007 again (saying he'd rather "slit his wrists" than play the role again - something he later retracted), it looks like some financial negotiations may well have to take place at some point soon.

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THE TALKING DEAD

FINALLY, THE WAIT IS OVER. AFTER BEING STUCK IN DEVELOPMENT FOR OVER TEN YEARS, THE MERC WITH A MOUTH IS APPEARING IN HIS VERY OWN FILM. BASED ON THE MARVEL COMICS CHARACTER OF THE SAME NAME, FOX'S DEADPOOL IS SET TO OFFEND AND AMAZE AUDIENCES...

First appearing in *The New Mutants* #98 (1991), Deadpool has recently seen a gigantic surge in popularity. Appearing in countless comic book series, cartoons and even his own videogame, he has become one of Marvel's hottest assets.

It's understandable to see why. Starting off as a villain, created by Rob Liefeld and Fabian Nicieza, Deadpool (also known as Wade Wilson) soon found his identity later on in Marvel's comics. A disfigured mercenary with a super-accelerated healing factor, his character developed into a mentally unstable, multifaceted anti-hero with a questionable origin. Often found breaking the fourth wall, Deadpool soon became a favourite amongst readers.

His comedic elements have been explored by a variety of great writers, but despite his early success everyone's favourite 'Merc with a Mouth' wasn't featured strongly outside of the comics for a long time. Apart from one brief appearance in the '90s X-Men cartoon and a minor role in the *Wolverine vs. Hulk* animated feature, he just wasn't anywhere to be seen. So, imagine the fan response when they discovered that Deadpool was appearing in Fox's new *Wolverine* film, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*.

**DEADPOOL
PREVIEW**



**By
Matt Wells**





Focusing on Wolverine's past life in *Weapon X*, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* boasted a selection of actors, with Ryan Reynolds cast as Deadpool. Reynolds, who had previously starred in *Van Wilder* and *Blade: Trinity*, seemed like the ideal actor to portray the unique personality of Wade Wilson. Perhaps the only saving grace of that particularly awful film, Reynolds delivered a wisecracking, cocky character, similar to Deadpool.

Everything appeared to be in order with Deadpool's casting. His film debut was promising at first, showcasing the enigmatic Merc with a Mouth perfectly.

Starring in a ridiculous foray of gunfire and swords, it felt like Fox had nailed the characterisation. That is until, Fox decided to make some unscrupulous changes to his character during the final sequence.

Sewing his mouth shut and providing him with optic blasts and Adamantium blades, Deadpool was unrecognisable in the showdown with Wolverine. Fans were enraged at the liberties that Fox had taken with their beloved character, stripping him of any of the qualities he originally had. Even a promising post-credits scene, couldn't make up for the fact that Deadpool was completely butchered beyond recognition.

After the opening weekend of *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, it didn't take long for Fox to announce that they had attached producer Lauren Shuler Donner to a new Deadpool spinoff film. Taking the

response from fans into account, Donner set on making it clear that Deadpool would be rebooted. This time, they weren't going to make the same mistakes.

Zombieland scriptwriters Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick were soon hired to produce a script in early 2010, but with Reynolds cast in DC's new *Green Lantern* film, fans wondered whether or not their favourite choice would manage to land the role for a second time. Reese and Wernick had tackled comedy and horror remarkably well in *Zombieland* beforehand, so the news sounded somewhat encouraging.

Fox still needed their director though, and they approached Robert Rodriguez and music video director Adam Berg. Despite some slight interest, both directors failed to fully negotiate with Fox. In a surprising turn of events, Fox finally announced their director two years later: visual effects director Tim Miller.

Known for his role as creative director for *Thor: The Dark World* and David Fincher's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *Deadpool*



will be Tim Miller's directorial debut. Whether or not Miller is the man for the job remains to be seen, but his short filmography has provided viewers with some slick and stylish intros, and Miller acted as the creative supervisor for Edgar Wright's phenomenal *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*, which is more than promising.

After Fox announced that they had found their director, everything went silent on the *Deadpool* front for almost 4 years. Rumours circled the Internet message boards surrounding its production, but Fox solely put their focus towards making some of their most successful X-Men movies to date, *X-Men: First Class* and *X-Men: Days of Future Past*.

During this silence, some test footage from Miller's visual effects company Blur Studios suddenly appeared online. Opening the scene with Deadpool sitting on a ledge listening to music whilst doodling, the

footage showcased Deadpool at his finest; taking out the bad guys in style, making wisecracks throughout. With no warning, this two-minute video almost blew up the entire Internet.

It was shared amongst social media, and message boards were on fire. Ryan Reynolds had provided the voice in the test footage, which proved he was still in the running to become the scarred mercenary. After the dismal performance of *Green Lantern*, however, it wasn't surprising that Reynolds happily returned. It was a superb bit of test footage, and it was clear that this was Fox gauging interest for the film, deciding whether or not Deadpool was truly worthy of his own feature-length production.

Of course, it was clear that fans were amazed by what they had seen, and Fox took notice of this reaction by suddenly announcing a release date for the film: February 12th, 2016. In just under 7 years,

Fox had surprisingly turned things round. With Ryan Reynolds back on board, this meant that fans may just receive the correct Deadpool.

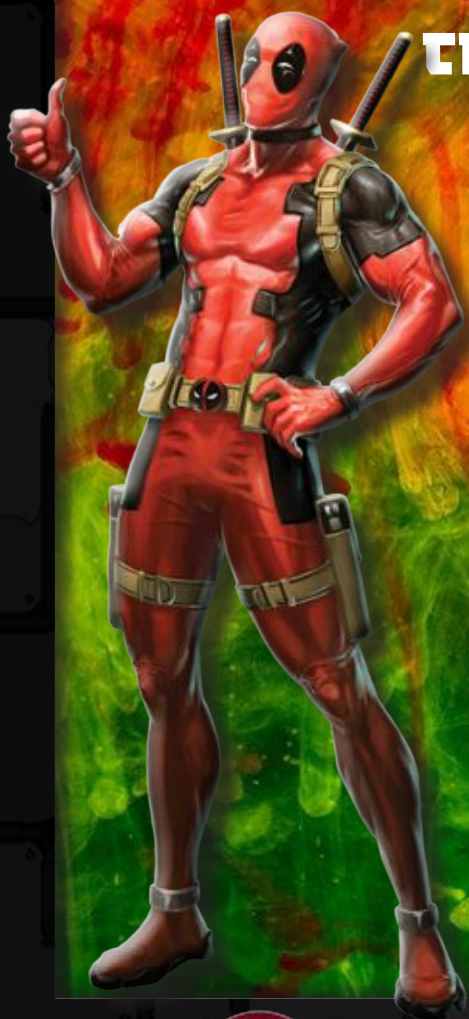
Fox wanted to make it clear that the film was going to be a part of their established X-Men universe. Following in the footsteps of Marvel Studios and their own X-Men franchise, they deemed it necessary to build upon their past work. This would throw *Deadpool* headfirst into their X-Men universe, allowing them to involve a variety of mutants.

Considering Fox's history with MPAA ratings, fans questioned whether or not *Deadpool* will stay true to its graphic nature. The comic is often ultra-violent and crude, and considering Fox have never breached the 12A certification in the UK, would *Deadpool* finally be the first to break the mould?

The question was posed across many news outlets, but Ryan Reynolds revealed

THE TOP 10 DEADPOOL STORIES

By Andrew Pollard



10. SUICIDE KINGS

Framed for a crime he didn't commit, this story sees Deadpool have to prove his innocence to The Punisher, Spider-Man and Daredevil. Of course, things don't start all that well when Frank Castle decapitates Wade in the early goings.



9. WADE WILSON'S WAR

Giving a glimpse into how Deadpool came to be, this particular arc looks a little into our hero's past via flashbacks that explain certain facets of Wade's character and how he became one of the deadliest men on the planet. Then again, not everything we see and hear from Deadpool may necessarily be true.



8. 5 RONIN

Set in an alternative timeline, this story sees Deadpool, Wolverine, Hulk, The Punisher and Psylocke reimagined as 17th century samurais. With the group breaking away from their masters to seek vengeance on a common foe, it comes down to Deadpool being the one who finally gets the job done.



the rating in the best fashion possible. Appearing on news show ExtraTV, host Mario Lopez (Slater from *Saved by the Bell*), was assaulted by Deadpool whilst conducting an interview with Ryan Reynolds. It's an excellent bit of marketing, as Deadpool happily announced the news that everyone wanted to hear; *Deadpool* is going to be R-rated.

Since production went underway, Reynolds reportedly battled for Fox to pick up the R-rated script over the PG13 one. Screenwriters Reese and Wernick had produced both versions, presumably wanting Fox to pick up the more offensive script. This probably meant a lack of cross-promotion for the film, but it's arguably the suitable choice for a comic book character as violent as Deadpool.

Just three months after the news hit, Fox unleashed the red band trailer. Showcasing Wade Wilson in all of his

gun-toting glory, it featured reoccurring characters from the comics, such as Blind Al and Weasel. Along with those staple characters were X-Men member Colossus and the mysterious mutant Negasonic Teenage Warhead.

Since its release, the red band trailer on YouTube alone has amassed almost 30 million views. With the vast majority of comments praising the trailer, it feels like Fox may have nailed the character of Deadpool. Covering the basic origin of the comic book character, the movie will focus on his attempt at curing his cancer, which effectively leaves him in a fractured mental state, along with some extraordinary regenerative abilities.

Deadpool will hunt down the people responsible for his disfigurement (and possibly other upsetting), whilst assisted by Negasonic Teenage Warhead. Played by Brianna Hildebrand, Negasonic

Teenage Warhead first appeared as a Grant Morrison creation in the *New X-Men* comic series. A teenage mutant with latent telepathic abilities, one would presume that she helps Deadpool track down his perpetrators.

Colossus' inclusion in the film is a mystery so far, but there's no doubt that his fight with the wisecracking mercenary will be an entertaining slog. Daniel Cudmore is no longer reprising his role in *Deadpool*, with Andre Tricoteux replacing him. The villains cast in the film appear in the form of Ajax and his henchwoman, Angel Dust, played by Ed Skrein and Gina Carano respectively.

Ajax being one of the main antagonists is great news for some of the bigger *Deadpool* fans out there, who know his long and twisted history with the character. A main component of *Deadpool*'s inner demons and mental

7. SINS OF THE PAST

What was notable about this arc is that it was the story that saw Wade Wilson really make the switch from villain to beloved anti-hero. It's also the first time that we get to see under Deadpool's mask and see the horrific result on his face of the cancer treatment that has left him disfigured.



6. IF LOOKS COULD KILL

Whilst Deadpool has been known to side with many a hero over the years, his teaming with Cable is one of more popular Marvel pairings. Essentially playing like a 'buddy cop' story, this arc sees Deadpool and Cable tied together by the fact that whenever one of them teleports, then the other appears at their side. This is also the tale that introduces Deadpool's famed sidekick, Bob, Agent of Hydra.



5. WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT COINCIDENCE

Another alternative timeline effort, this story sees Deadpool and Blind Al end up in a 1960s Spidey tale, specifically *The Amazing Spider-Man* #47. With Deadpool disguised as Peter Parker and Blind Al as Aunt May, The Merc with a Mouth pokes fun at '60s comic book stories in a mightily enjoyable read.



4. HEALING FACTOR

One of the more humorous Deadpool stories, this tale sees Wade suffering with a mental virus and struggling to fully control his reactions. So it's a good job that he's founded Deadpool Inc., his own gun-for-hire service!



3. THE FINAL EXECUTION SAGA

Whilst an X-Force story, this arc looked at Deadpool's morality. With the team tasked with killing Genesis (then known as Kid Apocalypse and with a destiny that will see him become the new Apocalypse) before he becomes all-powerful, it's actually Deadpool who breaks ranks and stops the death of the youngster before eventually enrolling him in The Jean Grey School for Gifted Youngsters.



state, Ajax is a threatening force to be reckoned with. Utilising all of these familiar faces must be a delight for readers, as it confirms that the film is staying true to the source material.

The origin story is often skewed throughout the comics, so it's a wonder as to which avenue the film will take. Perhaps the superhero genre has become a little oversaturated with origin stories, but considering some of Deadpool's darker beginnings, it may be a little different and refreshing to see. As long as it's not the main hook of the film, it should be fine and pleasing for viewers.

The type of humour already displayed so far in all of the footage provides a warm feeling inside. Miller may have captured Deadpool's comedic devices perfectly, but here's hoping that there's not an overreliance on Internet meme humour. Deadpool is renowned for referencing pop

culture and breaking the fourth wall, so that at least gives the film so much to work with. We've witnessed this already, when Wade Wilson slyly mentions something about not wanting an animated green costume in the trailer, a clear reference to DC's abysmal *Green Lantern* film.

Reynolds seems to be ecstatic over this role, and it's easy to see why. He's been gunning for a proper *Deadpool* film for years now, and he's finally got one filmed in his hometown of Vancouver. He's been seen outside of the production of the film, recently making an appearance alongside kids dressed up as mutants for Halloween, and also seen massaging Conan O' Brien. He undoubtedly embodies the role of Deadpool, and he may be just as equally important as Robert Downey Jr. is for the character of Tony Stark.

What does the box office hold for *Deadpool* though? Well, regarding the fact

that *Days of Future Past* was Fox studios' highest grossing X-Men film to date, it seems that *Deadpool* may follow up on the trend of successful comic book films, possibly becoming one of the highest box office earners of 2016. That might sound a little bit ostentatious, but Deadpool's popularity has even hit Wolverine levels.

He adorns a vast selection of Marvel official merchandise nowadays, appearing on almost every variant cover. He is one of the best-sellers on comic stands, and it's evident from the response so far that he's set to become an even bigger character than before.

Whether or not critics will feel the same way remains to be seen, but Fox have cleaned up their act in the past few years. They've stuck to their source material and built upon their foundations with some entertaining entries and capable directors. *Deadpool* seems to be in safe hands, and

2. DEADPOOL KILLS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE

In this does-exactly-as-it-says-on-the-tin tale, Deadpool goes on the rampage and slays the entire Marvel world. From the Fantastic Four to The Avengers, to The X-Men to Spider-Man, to The Punisher, and many, many more, all take their last breaths courtesy of The Merc with a Mouth as he executes each and every one of them in a variety of unique ways.



1. THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

With his Weapon X past suddenly catching up with him, the Merc with a Mouth enlists the help of two of Marvel's biggest names: Captain America and Wolverine. Whilst full of the usual humour and over-the-top action, this is also one of the Deadpool stories which explores the more tragic side of Wade Wilson, giving this the feel of being arguably the quintessential Deadpool tale.



Reynolds will be sure to deliver the definitive Merc with a Mouth.

For the naysayers of Fox Studios, it may come as a relief to see that *Deadpool* is getting the R-rated treatment here. If any of the X-Men were owned by Marvel Studios, then the likelihood of an ultra-violent *Deadpool* film would probably be impossible under Disney's rule. If anything, *Deadpool* will flourish under Fox.

If the movie does prove to be a massive success, then what does that mean for *Deadpool*? Sequels are bound to happen, and expect some hilarious cameos in some future X-Men films. Maybe he'll even get briefly enlisted into the X-Mansion. Some of his more memorable stories can be explored, such as his attempt at being a true hero, and his complicated relationship with the misguided messiah, the mutant Cable.

Hopefully, *Deadpool* will be a resounding success critically and commercially. With Ryan Reynolds having poured his heart into the film, and the direction that Tim Miller has taken, *Deadpool* may ultimately turn out to be one of the most surprising superhero pictures in the genre yet.



Expect blood, violence, and plenty of foul language when *DEADPOOL* hits UK cinemas on February 4th.



OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE WORLDS
OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH KIERON MOORE



Not unexpectedly, the Christmas special *The Husbands of River Song* (groan) bucked the trend by posting an overnight figure (to a largely captive Christmas early evening audience) of 5.77 million, logging an Audience Appreciation figure of 82, again roughly in line with the slightly more muted response from the audience to the latest series. The 7-day time shift took the figure to 7.7 million, which makes it the lowest-rated Christmas special by far since the tradition began in 2005 with Russell T Davies's thrilling *The Christmas Invasion* (the 2015 special sits at around a million fewer viewers than watched 2014's *Last Christmas* which had previously won the dubious honour of lowest-rated Christmas special). But once again, these figures need to be put into the context of steadily declining Christmas viewing which saw 2015's top Christmas show attracting an overnight audience of just under 7 million, a massive decline from the 12 and 13 million figures posted as recently as five years ago. **Doctor Who's** reduced numbers this Christmas are roughly in line with the decline posted by other headline shows screened on Christmas Day itself.

Fans may not regard the clear audience decline for **Doctor Who** in 2015 as especially worrying but it's almost certain that there'll be some furrowed brows (and, hopefully, questions asked) at the BBC as one of the Corporation's global 'superbrands' starts to look more than just a little shaky... PM

Ratings Update

Most of the numbers are now in – we're still awaiting final 28-day figures for the final episode and the 2015 Christmas episode, unavailable at the time of writing – and we can finally get a better perspective on **Doctor Who's** fall from grace during the recently-concluded ninth series. We might also charitably conclude that perhaps the picture isn't, in the end, quite as bleak as the poor initial overnight figures recorded for a string of episodes screened in a deeply unsuitable post-8pm Saturday night slot might have initially suggested. As this column has recently noted, the show's loss of viewers this year has finally brought it broadly in line with the decline suffered by other popular long-running shows on British TV over the last few years; but where **Doctor Who** had, year-on-year, seen its audience figures relatively stable across the first seven series of its 21st century reinvention, the drop suffered in the ninth is merely an accelerated and more sharply-felt version of the drop felt more gradually across the board on British TV over the last five years or so. The figures posted for Series Nine aren't, then, completely catastrophic but they do move the series out of the 'flagship drama' category its huge success had earned in its first few years and into the 'solidly successful' category of many mid-range contemporary dramas screened on the BBC throughout the year.

Here are the final currently available figures for the entire ninth series of **Doctor Who**, broadcast on Saturday evenings on BBC One in the UK between September 19th and December 5th, returning for the festive special on December 25th at 5.15pm. Figures shown are in estimated millions.

| | 7-day figure | 28-day figure |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| <i>The Magician's Apprentice</i> | 6.54 | 6.84 |
| <i>The Witch's Familiar</i> | 5.71 | 6.15 |
| <i>Under The Lake</i> | 5.63 | 6.10 |
| <i>Before The Flood</i> | 6.05 | 6.55 |
| <i>The Girl Who Died</i> | 6.56 | 7.07 |
| <i>The Woman Who Lived</i> | 6.11 | 6.47 |
| <i>The Zygon Invasion</i> | 5.76 | 6.24 |
| <i>The Zygon Inversion</i> | 6.03 | 6.75 |
| <i>Sleep No More</i> | 5.61 | 5.99 |
| <i>Face the Raven</i> | 6.05 | 6.51 |
| <i>Heaven Sent</i> | 6.19 | 6.60 |
| <i>Hell Bent</i> | 6.17 | n/a |



Relive Series Nine

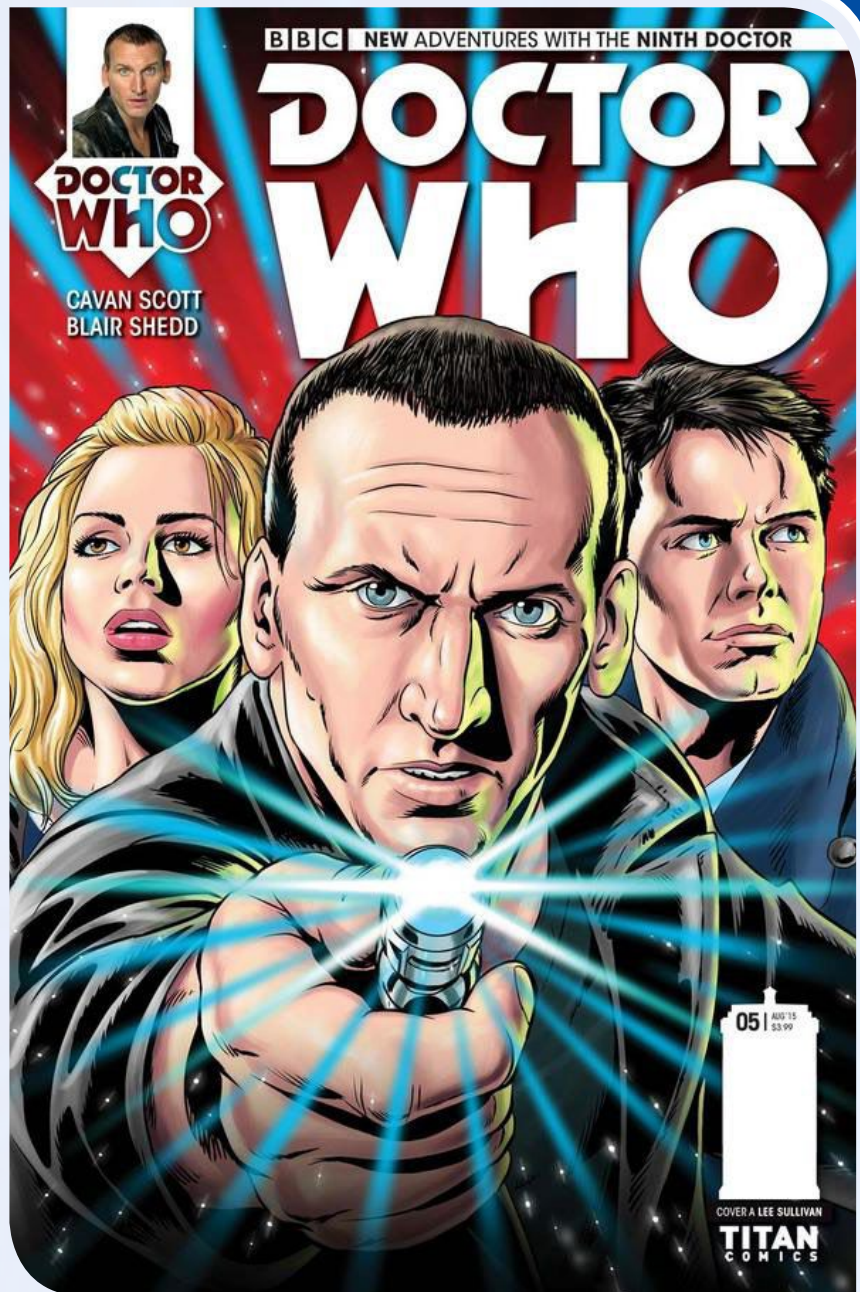
Details have been announced for the Blu-ray/DVD box-set of the Twelfth Doctor's second series, which will be released on March 7th in the UK and 5th April in the USA and Canada. In addition to the past autumn's twelve episodes, **The Complete Ninth Series** will include both the 2014 and 2015 Christmas specials – *Last Christmas* and *The Husbands of River Song*. It'll also come packed with over four hours of additional content, including all the series' **Doctor Who Extra** episodes, six new short documentaries, and a range of commentaries: Toby Whithouse, Sophie Stone and Derek Ritchie on *Under the Lake/Before the Flood*; Maisie Williams and Derek Ritchie on *The Woman Who Lived*; and Mark Gatiss and Reece Shearsmith on *Sleep No More*.

Those of you interested in looking at recent episodes from a different perspective may want to save your pennies and instead download the scripts for five episodes from series nine, now available online for free. Steven Moffat's opening two-parter and Sarah Dollard's acclaimed *Face the Raven* can be found on the BBC Writersroom website, while the two finale episodes are on the official **Doctor Who** site.

Look Ahead to Series Ten

Looking to the future, however, details remain sketchy as to when exactly we'll be seeing Series Ten. Thirteen episodes are planned, but filming is expected to start in May 2016 as opposed to the usual January, meaning that it's very likely the next episode we'll see will be next year's Christmas special. Hey, at least it's still more frequent than **Sherlock**.

On the plus side, at a screening of *The Husbands of River Song*, Steven Moffat revealed that he's had meetings with two writers new to the show who are "brilliant, prominent and amazing writers," adding that "if I told you their names, your brain would explode" – sure, this is yet another of the showrunner's trademark hyperbolically overblown soundbites, but some of the past few years' stand-out episodes have come from writers new to **Doctor Who**, so it's no bad thing that the show is continuing to bring on new talent.



WHO to Read in 2016

After the success of their five-part Ninth Doctor mini-series, Titan Comics has announced that the adventures of Christopher Eccleston's Doctor, with Rose Tyler and Jack Harkness in tow, will continue in an ongoing series. Scripted by Cavan Scott, this will run alongside Titan's Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Doctor lines. The first instalment, beginning a story called *Doctorman*, will hit stores in April 2016.

BBC Books, meanwhile, are set to release **Whoglyphica**, by Steve O'Brien, Simon Guerrier, and Ben Morris, in September 2016. This will be an exploration of the **Doctor Who** universe through various charts and infographics, from a star chart showing the co-ordinates of Gallifrey to a flow diagram depicting the allegiances between Daleks and Cybermen throughout history.

A Doctor's Visit for an Ill Fan

Thanks to an online fan campaign, various cast and crew members have sent messages to a young, hospital-bound **Doctor Who** fan who was too ill to attend the series' official festival. Fourteen-year-old Daniel, who suffers from Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, received video messages from Christopher Eccleston and Steven Moffat, and a visit in person from incumbent Doctor Peter Capaldi. Find the video at [@dannywho99](#) on Twitter for a reminder that, whatever your opinion on the current series, Mr. Capaldi is an undeniably lovely man.

WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK
AT THE WHONIVERSE
BY JR SOUTHALL



If you're the kind of person who wanders through social media after an episode of *Doctor Who* has been transmitted, especially if it was written by the current showrunner and more so if it's from the end rather than the beginning of the series, it's amusing how often you'll see people claiming "They're making this stuff up as they go along!" It's amusing because, well, taken on face value, isn't that how fiction works in a nutshell? But it's even more amusing because what the person saying it often really means is, "That isn't what I expected/wanted!"

In any other line of fiction – especially in detective fiction – it is actually something that the audience desires, to be surprised by the resolution. *Murder on the Orient Express* only works as well as it does because it provides a whole raft of plausible solutions to its conundrum, only to confound those who had guessed at a particular culprit by pulling the rug out from under every single individual guess a first-time reader could possibly have made. But modern *Doctor Who* has

a unique relationship with its fans, one that has developed increasingly during the current showrunner's tenure, in as much as those who are watching keenly enough don't like it when they can't second guess at the outcome every year. When the clues don't add up in quite the way the people following them had suspected they would, the person who devised those clues can be accused of not using them after the 'correct' fashion that those fans had predicted. It's a sense of ownership over the property that leads certain fans to feel cheated when the property doesn't behave in the way they'd expected (or wanted) it to, and rather than be pleased that the series is still capable of surprising them, they can instead react in quite the opposite way.

Steven Moffat has, of course, been tarred by the success of his predecessor. Russell T Davies might have been being a little disingenuous when he claimed in 2005 that he'd begun introducing the words 'Bad Wolf' into every episode without much idea as to where they might

lead, but his book *The Writer's Tale* tells the story of someone who really does fly by the seat of his pants when it comes to plotting not just his episodes but his series arcs as well. And because it very quickly became an established thing that between 2005 and 2010, *Doctor Who* actually was being made up by Davies as he went along, it becomes easy to imagine that the same is true of his successor.

Yet we all know that that's not how most writers work. Generally speaking, an author will have a pretty good idea of where his story is heading long before he ever sets pen to metaphorical paper, let alone before he writes his opening lines. The destination is always somewhere that the author is aiming towards, even if sometimes the journey itself is allowed to dictate the exact flow of events – and even in RTD's darkest hours he almost always knew more or less what his final pages would contain. That the resolution comes first is never truer than when an author is writing the kind of fiction that is predicated on the surprise reveal, wherein it

is imperative that he knows exactly how the resolution will work in order to successfully disguise it. It's just not possible to surprise your audience otherwise – as Davies himself occasionally found out when his finale episodes ended up confounding people instead.

Steven Moffat has made a career out of writing the kind of television that appears to skitter about all over the place before pulling together in the final act. *Joking Apart* and *Chalk*, in particular, were two series that thrived on the kind of comedic beats that involve throwing your characters into increasingly hair-raising and impossible situations, only for an eleventh hour solution to present itself – and always that solution comes logically out of the elements that the previous 25 minutes have been presenting. Farce just doesn't work if the explanation has come completely out of the blue, and no writer could successfully come up with a series of utterly logical and yet constantly surprising story climaxes if he wasn't completely in control of his art.

So it is with his *Doctor Who*. When Clara Oswald (or rather when Jenna-Louise Coleman, as she was at the time) turned up in *Asylum of the Daleks*, it was one of the biggest surprises the series has ever sprung – and automatically, the series' regular viewership were already creating their own explanations as to how she could have appeared. Which is to say nothing of the surprise Steven Moffat sprung within the episode itself, with the reveal that the Oswin character has actually been a Dalek all along. But the explanations that fans were creating around Coleman's appearance were never all going to be correct, and while some people were guessing in very much the right direction, the eventual explanation in *The Name of the Doctor* was never going to be precisely the way they'd already painted it in their minds. For the vast majority of people, this is just how life works; you expect things to be a particular way and when they aren't, you simply adapt to compensate.

That's not true for everybody though,



and for some, when a writer does things one way when you had expected them to be done another, it can present a barrier between their work and your enjoyment of it. The notion that *"That's not how it should have been done,"* very quickly evolves into *"This isn't how things are supposed to be,"* a wider malaise that affects your enjoyment of the series as a whole. Steven Moffat's writing has, undoubtedly, alienated a large enough number of classic series fans, in spite of being generally closer in tone to the original series than much of what his predecessor had produced. But it's those niggly things – the 'smart' dialogue, the number of occasions on which 'everybody' has lived, the possible over-reliance on clever solutions – that can become the object of a fixation once the writer's style has caused a *"That's not how things are supposed to be"* moment. It's very easy to become preoccupied with all the – often innocuous – instances of 'not *Doctor Who*-ness' at the expense of simply ignoring the few bits you don't like and

getting on with enjoying the bits you do. One of the criticisms of the first half of Series Six, for example, was how almost all the episodes were inextricably tied in with the series arc, when in fact all but three had no more than a fleeting glimpse of Madame Kovarian or a reference to Amy's potential pregnancy, moments that took up a few brief seconds of screen-time and that barely impinged upon the otherwise arc-free nature of the rest of those episodes.

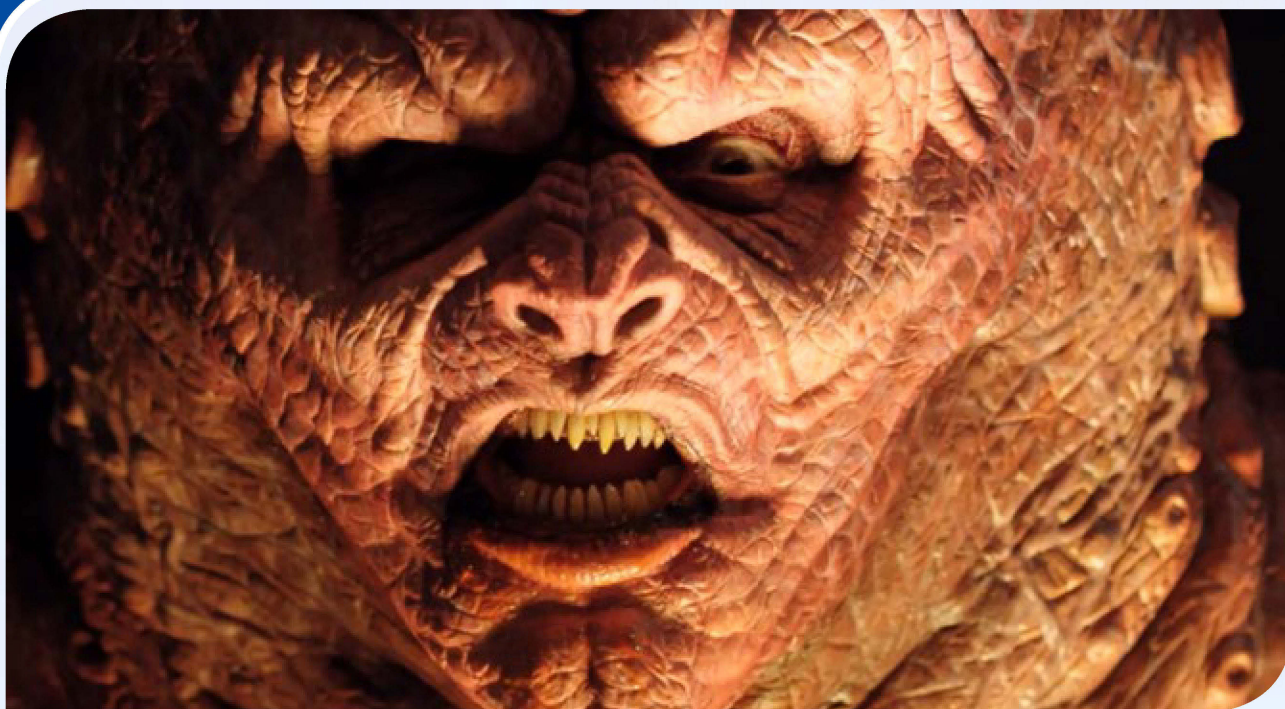
There are even people who claim that *Death in Heaven* is the worst episode of *Doctor Who* ever produced, purely because it includes the Cyber-Brigadier, when the simple extraction of that character would have left it a perfectly reasonable series finale. Does that make it the 'worst episode ever', then? Or just an okay – possibly even good – episode with a single bad idea?

And that's a matter of taste, rather than an objective approach to watching *Doctor Who*. If those people were able to watch the programme with any degree of detachment, they'd very likely have enjoyed all but a few moments of the story and would consign those few moments to the Not For Me bin. But *Doctor Who* doesn't allow for impartiality among its fans, in spite of a rich and diverse history in which the programme has very rarely been the same thing for any two consecutive producerships, because once you get too close to it 'the way things are supposed to be' becomes an overriding concern.

While in some ways that's not very healthy – in real life, if you resented *everything* that wasn't the way you thought it should be but which you had no control over, you'd spend almost all of your time feeling frustrated about one thing or another – it's also a sign that *Doctor Who* is still capable of provoking a powerful emotional response among those watching. And if it's doing that, it's proving that those people still care – even if things aren't the way they're supposed to be. +

ARTWORK BY SIMON BRETT





HERE TODAY... ZYGON TOMORROW

With Peter Harness' return to writing duties on *Doctor Who* seeing him follow up *Kill The Moon* with a full-scale Zygon invasion of Earth, now's a good a time as any to head to Scotland and look back on the first of their pitifully few appearances - their cameo in *The Day Of The Doctor* being only the second time they'd ever been seen on screen. The début for these giant orange living paving slab lookalikes came in 1975's *Terror of the Zygons*, with the team of the Fourth Doctor, Sarah Jane Smith and Harry Sullivan heading north of the border to investigate an attack on an oil rig in the North Sea.

For the man in the scarf, it's a first visit to the land of the Scots since two selves ago - having found himself present at the Battle of Culloden following his first regeneration, where he would acquire one of his longest-serving and best-known companions in the form of hardy young piper Jamie McCrimmon.

POLLY: *What about Jamie? We can't leave him here.*

DOCTOR: *True. His ship's sailed.*

POLLY: *What will you do?*

JAMIE: *Oh, I'll be all right. They won't catch me.*

BEN: *Did you hear that? They'll catch us all if we don't move fast.*

POLLY: *Doctor, can we take him with us?*

DOCTOR: *If he teaches me to play the bagpipes.*

JAMIE: *If you want, Doctor.*

And so the universe's least likely recorder/bagpipes combo was brought together.

They will at least get chance to jam in *The Nameless City* - the din from their collaboration disrupting the flow of the Archons, which move on the music of the spheres or *musica universalis*, in Michael Scott's contribution to the *Twelve Doctors*, *Twelve Stories* anthology!

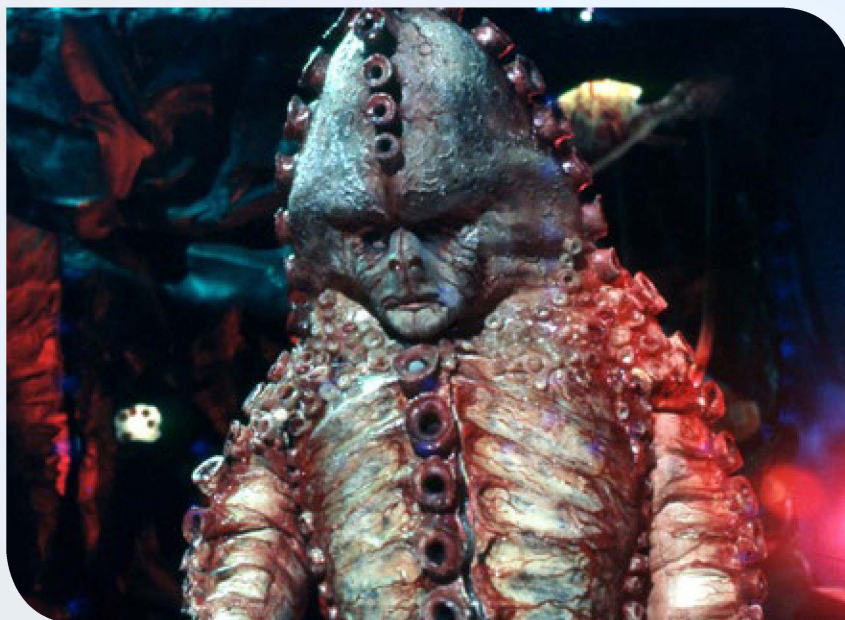
To business, now. With the Doctor having topped off his usual coat and scarf ensemble with a Tam o' Shanter of the sort last perched on his head during *The Highlanders*, there's something strange going on. And a certain bunch of shape-shifters are behind it all...

They've been kidnapping locals and impersonating them for their own ends, and the Skarasen, a Loch Ness Monsterish beastie, is the architect of the attack on the rig. Of course, there's some conjecture over whether or not Nessie is real, the debate having raged for years!

Its doppelgänger serves a rather important purpose to its masters...

HARRY: *How did you bring that creature to the Earth?*

BROTON: *As an embryo. The Skarasen is our life source. We Zygons depend upon*





its lactic fluid for survival.

HARRY: Mammals? If that thing's destroyed, then you die too.

BROTON: None of your puny human weapons can affect the Skarasen. Our technology is supreme.

HARRY: Our nuclear missiles.

BROTON: Would be mere pinpricks. We have converted the Skarasen into an armoured cyborg of devastating power. Nothing can stand against us. Nothing!

Mmm, just taste that milky goodness! Perhaps it's his run-in with the Zygons that persuades Harry to leave the Doctor's side as the final act of the adventure, though he will make a one-off return for *The Android Invasion*.

DOCTOR: Yes, that's the TARDIS. And I'm going to pilot it all the way to London. I can be there five minutes ago.

SARAH: Just a minute, Doctor. I thought you couldn't do that.

DOCTOR: Of course I can. Coming?

BRIGADIER: No, thank you.

HARRY: I think I'll stick to InterCity this time, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Sarah?

SARAH: Err...

DOCTOR: No?

SARAH: All right. Providing we do go straight back to London.

DOCTOR: Oh yes, we will. I promise.

Of course, Ms Smith would exit herself by the conclusion of *The Hand of Fear*, getting an accidental lift to Aberdeen. Unlike Harry, though, she would see the Doctor again a good seven selves on from that parting of the ways. The Tenth Doctor would also renew acquaintance with the Zygons in the *New Series Adventures* novel *Sting of the Zygons*, pre-wedding to Queen Elizabeth I.

ELIZABETH: What's that?

DOCTOR: It's a machine that goes ding. Made it myself. Lights up in the presence of shape-shifter DNA. Ooo. Also, it can

microwave frozen dinners from up to twenty feet and download comics from the future. I never know when to stop.

ELIZABETH: My love, I do not understand.

DOCTOR: I'm not your love, and yes you do. You're a Zygon.

ELIZABETH: A Zygon?

DOCTOR: Oh, stop it. It's over. A Zygon, yes. Big red rubbery thing covered in suckers. Surprisingly good kisser. Think the real Queen of England would just decide to share her throne with any old handsome bloke in a tight suit, just 'cos he's got amazing hair and a nice horse? Oh. It was the horse. I'm going to be King. Run!

His swanning off with his War and Eleventh incarnations and, by extension, jilting her will, of course, come back to

haunt him in *The Shakespeare Code*!

DOCTOR: Queen Elizabeth the First!

ELIZABETH: Doctor?

DOCTOR: What?

ELIZABETH: My sworn enemy.

DOCTOR: What?

ELIZABETH: Off with his head!

Their relationship later becomes a stick with which he's verbally beaten at least twice during his time trying out a bow-tied look again - Patrick Troughton having been acclaimed as an influence in both performance and wardrobe by Matt Smith. One of these is during his meeting with Liz Ten, Queen of England in *The Beast Below*...

"The Doctor. Old drinking buddy of Henry Twelve. Tea and scones with Liz Two. Vicky was a bit on the fence about you, weren't she? Knighted and exiled you on the same day. And so much for the Virgin Queen, you bad, bad boy."

But perhaps the cruellest barb regarding it comes from the Dream Lord, a physical manifestation of his own dark side brought to life courtesy of *"A speck of psychic pollen from the candle meadows of Karass Don Slava."* When the squat little fellow observes that Liz the First may well have *thought* she was the first, in an indication that there's a side of the Doctor that the chap with the *"cockamamie hair, the clothes designed by a first-year fashion student"* doesn't want anyone to see, least of all himself.

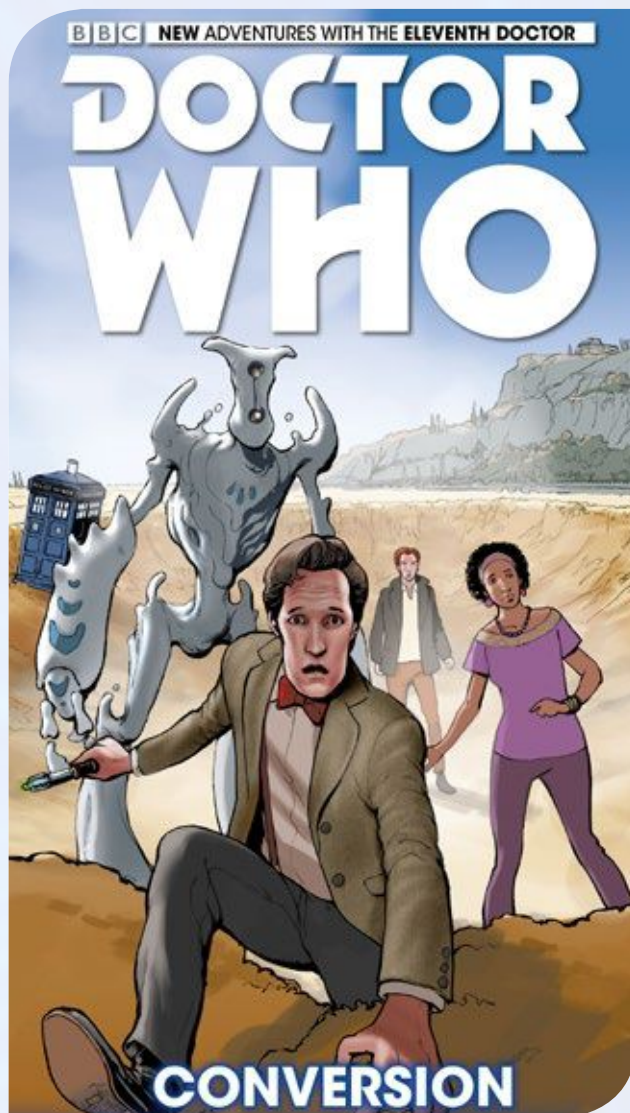
Too bad then that for the duration of *Amy's Choice* he's stuck with him in perhaps the ultimate dark night of the soul?

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY



REVIEWS

ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE WORLDS
OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH PAUL MOUNT

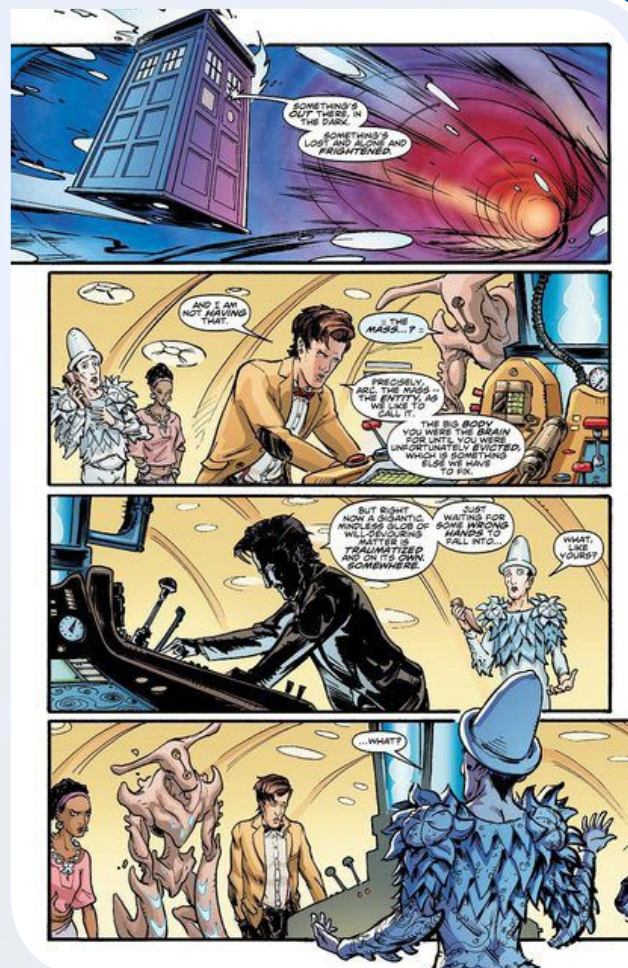


THE ELEVENTH DOCTOR VOL. 3: CONVERSION
WRITERS: AL EWING, ROB WILLIAMS / ARTISTS: SIMON FRASER, WARREN PLEECE, BOO COOK / PUBLISHER: TITAN COMICS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Titan Comics have been knocking it out of the park when it comes to their range of Doctor Who comic books. They've done this by picking each of their writers and artists very carefully. Titan runs separate titles for various incarnations of the Doctor, and for the Eleventh Doctor, they've chosen the team of Al Ewing, Rob Williams, and Simon Fraser. This happens

to be a team of creatives who are well known for being quirky and off-the-wall, yet filled with an underlying and engaging seriousness. Or to put it another way: a perfect matched team for creating Eleventh Doctor stories.

Doctor Who: The Eleventh Doctor Vol. 3: Conversion is the third and final part of Ewing's run, so the book mainly focuses on tying up



loose ends. What becomes apparent in this concluding instalment is that the trilogy's themes are tightly focused and deliberate. This is a story about compassion, identity and how acting purely through emotion and selfishness can end in ruined lives. Ewing, Fraser, and Williams have created a tale worthy of the Eleventh Doctor's epic adventures, yet they also keep things personal and thought-provoking.

Ewing is best known for writing comic books such as Zombo: Can I Eat You Please? and Loki: Agent of Asgard. His trademark approach is to take a slightly slanted look at the world the main character inhabits and then stir in a bit of

liberal politics and add some pop-culture inspiration. Whereas other writers may simply reference the odd David Bowie song, Ewing goes a step further and gives us a Doctor Who companion clearly inspired by Bowie. This makes for the perfect foil for many of the Doctor's shenanigans, and is the focus of much of the humour throughout.

This, coupled with illustrator Simon Fraser's ability to make even a conversation in a shop look like a scene from an action movie, makes for a highly enjoyable Doctor Who romp. Firmly recommended.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★ 8



DOCTOR WHO EARLY ADVENTURES 2.3: THE BLACK HOLE

DIRECTOR: LISA BOWERMAN / **AUTHOR:** SIMON GUERRIER / **PUBLISHER:** BIG FINISH / **STARRING:** FRAZER HINES, DEBORAH WATLING, RUFUS HOUND, DAVID WARNER / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

The Second Doctor has a rather unique flavour that's challenging to capture. Troughton's Doctor was very much a product of its age, and combined highly imaginative and free flowing storytelling with a sense that anything was possible (provided it was within budget). What Big Finish have done is rather remarkable; they've bottled the pure excitement of The Second Doctor, and made it new, fresh and exciting whilst keeping the classic vibe.

The plot is anything but straightforward; The Black Hole is a tale of science gone awry and time-distortion. The basics revolve around

the titular Black Hole which is causing time to stand still on a research space station. The Doctor and his companions (Victoria and Jamie) are unaffected, of course. Along for the ride are Commander Flail and the Time Lord Constable Pavo, played by the rather marvellous Rufus Hound, who spends much of the production chewing the scenery. The tale is long and fairly complicated, with plenty of surprises peppered along the way. It all feels like a proper piece of old-fashioned '60s style telefantasy.

The production is of the superb quality we've come to expect from Big Finish. The

entire affair is evocative of the Troughton period and the acting is superb throughout. Hines puts in a superb performance as both Troughton and Jamie, and Deborah Watling picks up the role of Victoria effortlessly. It's hard not to feel a twinge of nostalgia when listening to The Black Hole.

At two hours, this particular slice of Doctor Who is just long enough to both evoke the past and also innovate new things in familiar spaces. Who fans of all kinds will lap this up.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



TORCHWOOD: ONE RULE

DIRECTOR: BARNABY EDWARDS / **AUTHOR:** JOSEPH LIDSTER / **STARRING:** TRACY-ANN OBERMAN, GARETH ARMSTRONG, REBECCA LACEY, DAN STARKEY, CATRIN STEWART / **PUBLISHER:** BIG FINISH / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Here we are again. It's strange to think that even a few months ago, Torchwood stories weren't a regular thing. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't sometimes question what we're given.

True, when someone asks you to think of a character from Torchwood, odds are Yvonne Hartman wouldn't be your first choice, so we applaud Big Finish's decision to put her front and centre this time around. A murder mystery with an alien at its heart, set in the recent past when Torchwood 1's leader still ruled the roost, sounds like quite a good idea for a story. It's just a shame the finished product is, well, a bit ropey. There's no real mystery to proceedings, as any reader

of mysteries will guess more or less what is going on pretty quickly. The blindingly obvious solution is even remarked upon by the characters. This is troubling, though it is consistent with Torchwood's famously hit-and-miss quality.

There's a fair bit of 'I'm describing the world around me' dialogue, which makes the story feel like it was originally intended for a visual medium and that it has been adapted rather haphazardly. The opening scenes in particular are dripping with this.

It's also interesting to note that even though they were able to get Gareth David-Lloyd to reprise the role of Ianto earlier in the year, he was unable to contribute anything to a phone conversation that

Yvonne has with Ianto. This is such a shame – surely they could have slipped him a line or two for later use?

It was hard to care about the characters much as we haven't had a chance to form much of a relationship with any of the murder victims, and anything that affects Yvonne personally is a bit hard to swallow given her demeanour through the story beforehand.

We may be the outlier here, but we found this hour of Torchwood to be pretty forgettable, and even a cameo from some familiar Torchwood voices isn't enough to save this. Chuck it in the Rift, we say.

SCOTT VARNHAM

★★★★★★★★★★ 6



THE DIARY OF RIVER SONG: SERIES 1

DIRECTOR: KEN BENTLEY / **AUTHOR:** JENNY T. COLGAN, JUSTIN RICHARDS, JAMES GOSS, MATT FITTON / **STARRING:** ALEX KINGSTON, PAUL MCGANN, ALEXANDER VLACHOS, ALEXANDER SIDDIG, SAMUEL WEST / **PUBLISHER:** BIG FINISH / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

website with The Diary of River Song: Series 1. This is another high-profile release for Big Finish as part of its extended license, and much anticipated. Not only does Alex Kingston come back to the title part (and take centre-stage), but she is also accompanied by Paul McGann as the Eighth Doctor.

The first story is Jenny T. Colgan's The Boundless Sea and gives River a chance to be an archaeologist while also facing some challenges and the somewhat inept assistance of Alexander Vlahos as British Consul Bertie Potts. The tomb setting may be somewhat de rigueur but the story finds a way to show us how River acts as the core of the story and brings her own personality to the party. The second story is Justin Richards' I Went to a Marvellous Party, which sets out part of the bigger

picture for the set of stories and brings other characters to the fore, including Alexander Siddig's Marcus Gifford. Somewhat reminding the listener of some scenes from Husbands of River Song (i.e. the starliner), Justin finds a plot that moves River Song from A to B and shines a light on the nature of those manipulating events. There's also a whodunit!

The third story is James Goss' two-hander with Alex Kingston and Samuel West as River and Mr. Song in the hunt for planet-killing SporeShips. The change of pace is marked and gives Kingston a chance to show her versatility. Events come to a conclusion in script editor Matt Fitton's The Rulers of the Universe and it's here that we also see the Eighth Doctor enter. Many challenges here, including how to deal with the crossing

of timelines – lest we forget, the Tenth Doctor (Silence in the Library) hadn't met River before, so how can the Eighth Doctor be in the same story? More importantly, River has to make sure the Doctor survives events without giving away any spoilers. This is a pacey story, ticking lots of boxes.

The release consists of four single CD stories, and a fifth CD of behind the scenes interviews. The sound is rich and Ken Bentley's direction captures the light and shade of this great range of stories. With this set, River Song is immediately at home on audio, and March 2016 sees River in the Eighth Doctor boxset Doom Coalition 2. Roll on March!

TONY JONES

★★★★★★★★★★ 8

Hot on the heels of the Christmas Special, The Husbands of River Song, Big Finish released a present on download via its



DOCTOR WHO - THE WAR DOCTOR VOL 1: ONLY THE MONSTROUS

DIRECTOR & AUTHOR: NICHOLAS BRIGGS / PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / STARRING: JOHN HURT, JACQUELINE PEARCE, BETH CHALMERS, LUCY BRIGGS-OWEN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Back in 2013, we were introduced to a special kind of Doctor that was unique from his other twelve incarnations. This was a Doctor who turned his back on the name in order to do what had to be done, and that man was the War Doctor. Played outstandingly by the legendary Sir John Hurt, this enigmatic version of the Time Lord stole the entire 50th Anniversary (best Doctor Who episode) right from under both Matt Smith and David Tennant's noses, and

Nicholas Briggs clearly had a tall mountain to climb when tackling this story, because setting it within the Time War itself means it has to stand as a compelling war story with the stakes and scale being massive enough to take place across time and space. Also, it has to tackle the prospect of the Doctor not wanting to be the Doctor: a Doctor who makes the most difficult of decisions, decisions of which no other Doctor would've have

just like Paul McGann's 8th Doctor, Hurt's War Doctor is now no longer confined to just one episode thanks to Big Finish. The first of a new series of audio adventures set during the Time War, this 3-part story, Only The Monstrous, sees the War Doctor trying to stop the Daleks' alliance with the war-hungry Taalysens.

dare to make. Briggs manages to succeed on both of those levels with flying colours, and what his story manages to do extremely well is offer a more deeper and personal insight into John Hurt's Doctor and explore the inner emotional turmoil that is clearly going on within him. This is a man, who hates himself for what he's become and what he is forced to do during the Time War, yet despite how tragic and bitter he's become, he still manages to be the Doctor when he chooses to defend the planet of Keska from the Dalek/Taalysen faction.

John Hurt is still phenomenal as the War Doctor, capturing the dark complexity and world-weariness he embodied in the 50th Anniversary. More brilliant is that, despite coming across as rude or abrasive, Hurt never makes his Doctor come across as a cold and calculating warrior who wasn't any different to both the Time Lords and Daleks, instead making him more of a tragic and sympathetic figure. Even though Hurt is clearly the star of the show, the rest of the performances were still incredibly solid and worked well with the tone of the story. Lucy Briggs-Owen was brilliant as Rejoice and comes across as great companion

material, whilst Beth Chalmers is hilariously stubborn as Time Lord lackey Veklin. Jacqueline Pearce (previously Chessene in 1985's The Two Doctors) is simply sublime as the manipulative Cardinal Ollistra, who definitely comes across as not your typical friendly Time Lord of old, but more of an ice queen in waiting; who knows what antics she'll get up to in future stories?

As it stands, Only The Monstrous is an epic war story in more ways than one. Instead of starting off at break-neck speed, Briggs makes this more of a character study with action-packed interludes, as well as being bold enough to tackle heavy and weightier themes, such as the importance of peace at a time of war, or accepting the loss of someone or something you've been fighting for. Despite a stellar cast, John Hurt easily steals the show and out-acts everyone, proving that he is just as iconic as the other twelve actors that have been lucky enough to play the infamous Time Lord. A strong beginning for what is shaping out to be an epic series, which brilliantly carries on the legend of the War Doctor.

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★★★★★ 9



ALL-CONSUMING FIRE

DIRECTOR: SCOTT HANDCOCK / AUTHOR: GUY ADAMS, ANDY LANE / STARRING: SYLVESTER MCCOY, SOPHIE ALDRED, LISA BOWERMAN, NICHOLAS BRIGGS, RICHARD EARL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

One of the most common questions current Doctor Who showrunner Steven Moffat has had to fend off is whether the Doctor will ever meet that other hero of his, Benedict Cumberbatch's Sherlock. And yet, that very crossover happened twenty-one years ago, albeit with different incarnations of both heroes, in Andy Lane's New Adventures

novel All-Consuming Fire. That novel has become the latest in a series of fan favourites to be adapted by Big Finish into the audio format.

All-Consuming Fire starts off like a proper Sherlock Holmes story, with a case taking in the gangs of London, dog fighting, and a secret library, and with some finely plotted moments of deduction. But when the Doctor visits 221B Baker Street, things start to get unusual. The second half feels more like a Doctor Who story, with a portal underneath an Indian palace and a trip to an alien planet leading to a confrontation with a god-like being. It's at this bombastic climax where the story falters, becoming a little too simplistic and action-oriented and so not giving us the clever pay-off Holmes fans in particular may expect.

Nevertheless, the story's simplicity makes it easy to enjoy the team-up of the characters, who fit neatly into

each other's worlds; Holmes being uncharacteristically perplexed upon first meeting the Doctor is a highlight, as are Holmes and Watson's differing reactions to arriving on an alien planet. The dynamic gets mixed up further in the second half when the Doctor's companions Ace and Benny show up; it's particularly enjoyable to hear archaeologist-from-the-future Benny contribute to solving the mystery while challenging Victorian assumptions of how a woman should behave – even flirting with Watson, to the horny old soldier's delight.

Writer Guy Adams has done a good job of adapting Lane's novel, having struck a good balance between scenes narrated by Watson or Benny (with the narration reducing the need for awkward exposition), and scenes reflecting Big Finish's usual play-like style. And though some elements, such as the novel-within-a-novel framing and appearances

from Mycroft Holmes and Professor Moriarty, have been cut for pace, their omissions don't damage the story.

The cast are on fine form, too – as the Doctor and his companions, McCoy, Aldred, and Bowerman work as well together as ever, while Nicholas Briggs and Richard Earl are a traditional but solid Holmes and Watson. Watch out too, for Poirot star Hugh Fraser in a role that we won't spoil for you but which is strongly connected to the Holmes mythos.

So stop worrying about how it fits into the continuity and enjoy this lovingly crafted retro-Wholock; though the later part of the story may rely on one sci-fi action cliché too many, spending time in the company of McCoy's Doctor, Briggs' Holmes, and respective companions is a delight.

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★★★★★ 8

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LIVVY BOOTE is...

THE GIRL FROM X PLANET X



You walk into the movie theatre. You've been excited about the release of this movie for ages. The trailers looked great, and what's more, there's an interesting looking female character in it too. That's always pretty encouraging, and for that, they've earned some brownie points.

You're absently crunching on your popcorn. The movie's great so far, just as you expected, and you're eagerly waiting to meet the heroine. Then, finally, she arrives. The camera pans over her entire body, starting with her slender legs, which are parted as if to imply that this makes her ballsy and kick-ass, moving up to her perfect bum before finally resting on her spotless, pale face. She's holding a bazooka, having just destroyed an army of bad guys in one go. And, with a smirk and a quirk of the eyebrow, she says:

"I had three brothers. You learn these things."

Your heart sinks. It's the same thing every time.

Sadly, we get quite a few of these within the genre. The good thing is, you also get plenty of shows and films that flip these stereotypes on their heads. Let's look at a few examples of how *not* to write female characters...

1) The Male Hero with Boobs

Now, there's nothing wrong with being a boy who's girly or being a girl who's boyish, or with transgender characters (in fact, we encourage this). There is, however, an issue with teaching people that 'strong' female

characters are only strong when they're basically entirely masculine - apart from their boobs. This is arguably the most sexist stereotype of them all because she not only has no evidence of being written as a convincing woman, she's also a misogynist herself. As she hits the bad guy square in the face, dodging his attack, she says, "*you hit like a girl*" as if that's an insult. She's 'not like those other girls' - she's a special snowflake who hangs out with the guys, drinks beer, and even burps! Male audiences feel like they can relate to her because she's got all the characteristics of a 'typical man', whilst also fantasising about her because she's sexy. She's the perfect girlfriend. She's 'one of the guys', but with enormous knockers, too. In other words, she's fabricated purely for male pleasure.

A good example of sexy women who know how to use weapons is Harley Quinn. She's used to being in largely male environments and thrives in it, but the story of her destructive relationship with The Joker and some elements of her past remind us that she is a woman who deals with real female problems.

2) The Asian Stereotype

According to sci-fi and fantasy, all Asian female characters are required to have a black bob, a streak of bright blue or pink in their hair, and know martial arts. They're small, they're fiery, and they'll kick your ass. But isn't this perhaps a little bit - no, *really* racist? This stereotype fetishises Asian women, making it seem like they're all cute and small, and secretly ninjas. Not only that, but it generalises Asian people as a whole. Too many people already associate Asia with just being China. This kind of character reinforces this way of thinking, making people think that all Asian women on the screens should be like this one character. It's sexist, it's racist, and it's limiting.

Sense8 challenges this stereotype with Sun, a Korean businesswoman who seems to be the only one with any sense out of all her colleagues - two of whom also happen to be her brother and father. She's been brought up to know how to defend herself and can kick some *serious* ass, and alongside this, we see some cultural context and a personality beyond being a skilled martial artist. In other words, the *Sense8* writers haven't been lazy in developing Sun as many others are when creating Asian female characters.



Ah yes, the Asian girl with quirky, dyed hair.

Sci-fi and fantasy have given us some amazing female characters. And some less amazing ones, too...



"On your left, folks, you'll see the female CEO haircut."

3) The CEO

She's cold. She's emotionless. A she-devil who makes everyone's lives a living hell. Soon you discover that actually she's broken and dead inside, because all this time when she thought she wanted to be the boss, what she really wanted... was a *family*. And she has to have an angular bob hairstyle. That's essential.

Yes, I might be specifically talking about *Jurassic World* here. But the CEO character is problematic in many TV shows and movies. These kinds of boss ladies are never complex, never developed beyond the point of being terrifying and in charge - and, in order to achieve this level of authority, unlike male bosses, their characters apparently have to be stripped of all personality and feeling. It's as if people think that women have to be emotionally stunted to be good leaders, and even then, we're meant to hate them.

Sense8's Sun once again triumphs in this respect. Not only is she a female boss working in a horrifically sexist environment, but she's also a skilled martial artist, devoted to her family, and most importantly, to herself. She isn't the stereotypical white woman with a sharp haircut who always looks perfect, nor has she been created to be converted into a 'real woman' who wants to raise a family. No - Sun is a hardworking, natural born leader, whilst actually, you know, having a personality.

4) The Girl-on-Girl Fight Scene

It's reached that point in the fast-paced, explosive movie you've rented where the goodies finally fight the baddies face-to-

face. It's good old-fashioned fisticuffs time. There goes your main guy, chasing the baddy in his fancy car. But wait, where's the female character who's name you can't remember, who's purely there to serve as the love interest? Ah, there she is - she's rolling around half naked with the female baddie you didn't know existed until two minutes ago. They're wrestling each other, by this point quite sweaty, and - oh, there goes another large rip her T-shirt, which perfectly reveals her bra. At last, the goody kills the baddie, doing what the male protagonist couldn't.

"Never send a man to do a woman's job."

...Right.

If you want some gender equality on your screens to make sure your female characters are kicking just as much as the men would, just... *don't* gradually de-clothe them as they fight. This is not a sex scene. Or at least, make the guy whip his shirt off too, for a bit of balance. Take *Sailor Moon*. These are girls who have cute clothes and know how to fight. There are plenty of fights between women that aren't hypersexualised. They're just doing their job defending the world, man. And *Buffy*, when she's fighting the morally ambiguous Faith or the goddess Glory, she's just doing what she's gotta do. Fights between female characters shouldn't be any different to the ones between male characters - simple. And besides, why do they need to be fighting their own gender in the first place?

5) The High-School Bitch

You know literally nothing about this

character. All you know is that she wears short skirts and constantly says mean things to your wallflower werewolf protagonist - and all of this makes her a villain, a terrible human being. Every blonde girl in a cheerleader outfit is *evil*. *Hiss*.

I was uncool at school, too. I used to be convinced that all 'cool' girls were awful, and that's because of movies like these. Or because of books like *Twilight*, where I thought 'Oh my gosh, I totally am Bella! We're practically the same because we're unpopular'. And it feels nice when you're young and a bit of a loser, but it's actually a really toxic way of seeing the women around you. Thankfully, there's Cordelia from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. At first, you think she's your typical high-school bitch. Until we find out that she's got a little more to her than that, and, you know, is a nice human being despite being a beautiful teenage girl.

Sci-fi and fantasy are among the biggest culprits for these stereotypes, but it's also one that defies them regularly. There are some great movies ahead of us - Disney's *Moana*, the *Ghostbusters* reboot, and hopefully, the future releases of Marvel and DC, which will give us some awesome diversity. Let's be thankful that whilst female stereotypes still exist, they're also still being broken and challenged. ✦



A sexist movie poster stereotype that I've never understood - we must watch the film from between her legs!

Twenty Years of Scares

A LOOK AT

Goosebumps

BY KATE FATHERS

As the new adaptation of the popular kids' books starring JACK BLACK hits UK screens, STARBURST takes a trip down memory lane to celebrate the wonderful world of GOOSEBUMPS...

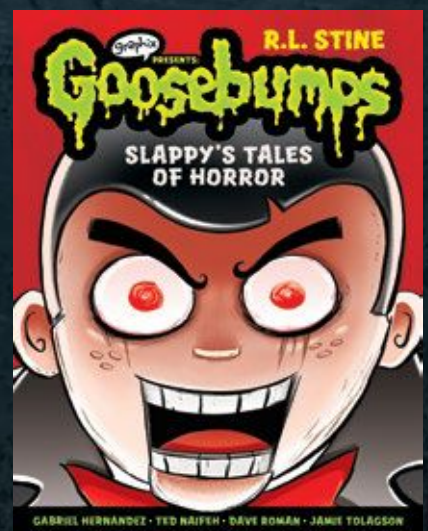


If you were a kid in the '90s who loved a good scare, then you worshipped at the altar of R. L. Stine.

Robert Lawrence Stine is considered the king of kid horror, having introduced an entire generation to all things terrifying, but that wasn't always his genre of choice. After graduating from Ohio State University in 1965, he spent years writing joke and humour books under the name Jovial Bob Stine. It wasn't until the late 1980s that Stine made the switch, shortly after his wife co-founded Parachute Press, and published his first book of horror fiction: the teen novel *Blind Date*. Other young adult books quickly followed, including the popular *Fear Street* series, and with encouragement from his publishers Stine tried his hand at writing for an even younger crowd. In 1992, he published the first of sixty-two *Goosebumps* books: *Welcome to Dead House*.

Those early books, released between 1992 and 1997, are officially known as the 'original series' of *Goosebumps* novels. Aimed at older kids and pre-teens, the books themselves have short chapters and simplistic

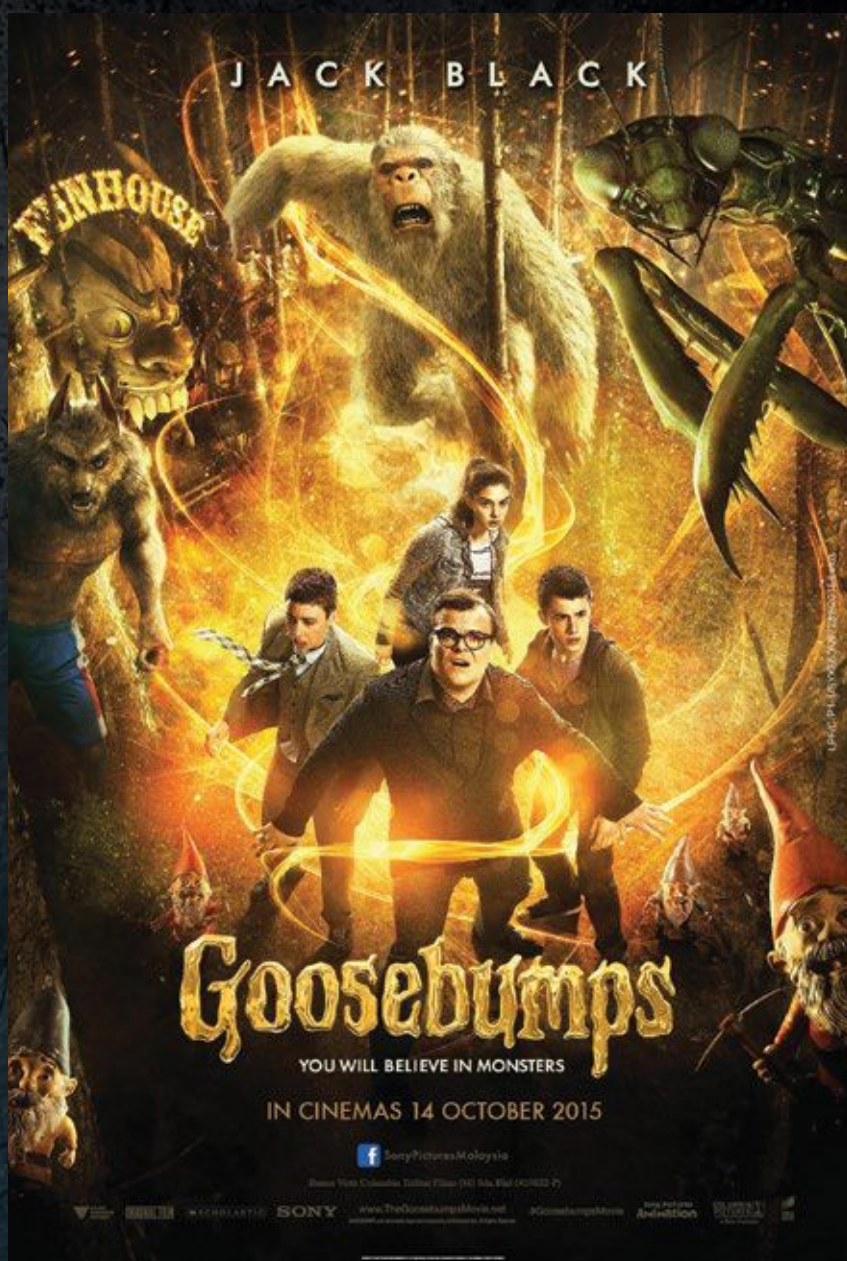
sentences (although some teenage vocabulary) paired with vivid characters and engaging plots and sometimes, no happy endings. Stine does not pander to his readers, even though some just turned ten, and he doesn't shy away from intense scenarios or frightening



themes. Some horrible things happen in these books, and it's not just the ghosts and werewolves and Blobs. Stine explores classic themes like isolation, doubt, and the fear of change, all of which are scary to adults but are outright terrifying to children, who crave stability and the familiar. But in growing up you often find instability, and sometimes you're confronted with the unfamiliar, and the perfect way to introduce those feelings (and how to cope with them) to kids is through the safety of fiction. Most of the books are written in first person, which allows for a fantastic intimacy with the characters, who are also as varied as the kids who read them, ranging from the well-adjusted to the bullied, to the bullies themselves. Both male and female characters are allowed to be complex, which further enables kids to connect with them and then learn from them. This also meant that although the series was initially written for girls (a bit of a coup, given what is usually marketed to girls), both genders took to it, and at its height *Goosebumps* volumes were spending weeks on the USA Today bestseller list.

While Stine wrote the main *Goosebumps* series, he also continued to build on the brand with other work. Between 1994 and 1997 he wrote a series of short story collections called *Tales to Give You Goosebumps*. Then, from 1995 to 2000 came the interactive series *Give Yourself Goosebumps*. Then, in November 1997 and May 1998, he published two more short story collections under the umbrella title *Goosebumps Triple Header*; from 1998 to 2000 was the series *Goosebumps 2000*. And if *that* wasn't enough, Stine crafted holiday-themed stories and collections in between.

With *Goosebumps* more popular than ever, Scholastic Productions (in partnership with Protocol Entertainment) crafted a TV series that



premiered in North America in 1995. It ran for four seasons, 74 episodes in total, some of which were introduced by Stine himself. Despite its predilection for hokey acting and cheesy CGI, it was well received by both Canadian and American audiences. UK audiences, on the other hand, had a more difficult time. When it was brought to CBBC in 1997, many early episodes were deemed too risqué for children, resulting in episodes being either banned or heavily edited. That was a huge shame, as in addition to the creepy content, many *Goosebumps* episodes had diverse casts, challenged gender roles, and starred well-known (and soon-to-be well-known) actors like Amanda Tapping, Hayden Christensen, Colin Mochrie, Adam West, Ryan Gosling, and Scott Speedman. Also, who *didn't* love Jack Lenz's theme tune?



Unfortunately, by the late 90s the popularity of *Goosebumps* had begun to fall, and a licensing dispute had broken out between Scholastic and Parachute. Stine published his last *Goosebumps* book in 2000 and moved on to other projects, such as *The Nightmare Room* and *Rotten School*. In 2003, Scholastic bought all existing and future rights to *Goosebumps*, but it wasn't until 2008 that R. L. Stine was willing to publish another story. *Goosebumps* returned as *Goosebumps HorrorLand*, a series that ran from 2008 to 2012 and used the HorrorLand featured in the original 1994 novel. After its success, Stine released the current series: *Goosebumps Most Wanted*, featuring some classic villains. The latest volume, *Night of the Puppet People*, was released on September 29th, 2015.

Readers beware – R. L. Stine is certainly not out of scares.

GOOSEBUMPS heads into UK cinemas on February 5th.

WITH SO MANY BOOKS TO CHOOSE FROM, WHICH ONES ARE THE MOST MEMORABLE? HERE'S STARBURST'S TOP 10



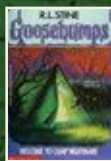
10. STAY OUT OF THE BASEMENT

The second story in the *Goosebumps* series sees siblings Margaret and Casey Brewer worry over the strange behaviour of their out-of-work father. If you've ever wondered if your parents have been replaced with pod people, well... it might be as horrifying as this.



9. SAY CHEESE AND DIE!

Putting a deadly spin on technology is what modern horror is all about, and the camera is an easy target. In a kid-friendly version of *Shutter*, friends Greg, Michael, Doug and Shari find a camera that takes photos of your misfortune. A photo of a smiling Michael shows him falling through a stair railing. A picture of a pristine car comes out destroyed. You'll never take a selfie again.



8. WELCOME TO CAMP NIGHTMARE

When you're a kid, there is nothing scarier than being left alone with an untrustworthy adult. Unfortunately for Billy, Camp Nightmoon is full of them, from Larry the apathetic camp counsellor to Uncle Al, the sinister leader. Conditions get worse when campers start to go missing, and while the twist at the end is a little weird, it did ensure one thing: you never wanted to spend summers away from home.



7. NIGHT OF THE LIVING DUMMY II

Slappy returns! Now belonging to Amy Kramer, Slappy creates a rift between his new owner and her friends and family, as he terrorises them and puts the blame on her. It's frustrating when you're not being heard, and frightening when it might mean someone's life.



6. ONE DAY AT HORRORLAND

Upsetting the norm is a staple of horror fiction, and turning a happy theme park into something deadly is a perfect example. Rollercoasters and haunted houses are frightening enough, but after this book, we all thought twice about going to the fair.



5. THE WEREWOLF OF FEVER SWAMP

Werewolves are a classic part of the horror genre, as are mist-choked swamps. Together, they are enough to terrify every reader as we watch the environment close in on twelve-year-old Grady Tucker. Something lurks amongst the trees. It pounds against the front door. And everyone keeps telling him that werewolves can't be real, even when one is snapping at his heels.



4. A NIGHT IN TERROR TOWER

There's something about old buildings that have always been a little frightening. Their history. The long-gone lives that touched the walls. And no place is more scarred than an old prison. Sue and Eddie are touring Terror Tower, but they find more than ghosts walking the halls. It made you think twice about going on holiday.



3. THE HAUNTED MASK

Losing control is a scary thing, and it's exactly what Carly Beth experiences when she buys a Halloween mask to scare the schoolyard jerks. It does the job, but then the mask won't come off. Then the voice that comes out of its lips is not her own. And quickly she starts to wonder if she'll ever be Carly Beth again.



2. THE GHOST NEXT DOOR

Hannah thinks her new neighbour might be a ghost, and kids everywhere got their first taste of existential horror. If this didn't leave you permanently questioning your own existence, then I don't know what book you were reading.



1. NIGHT OF THE LIVING DUMMY

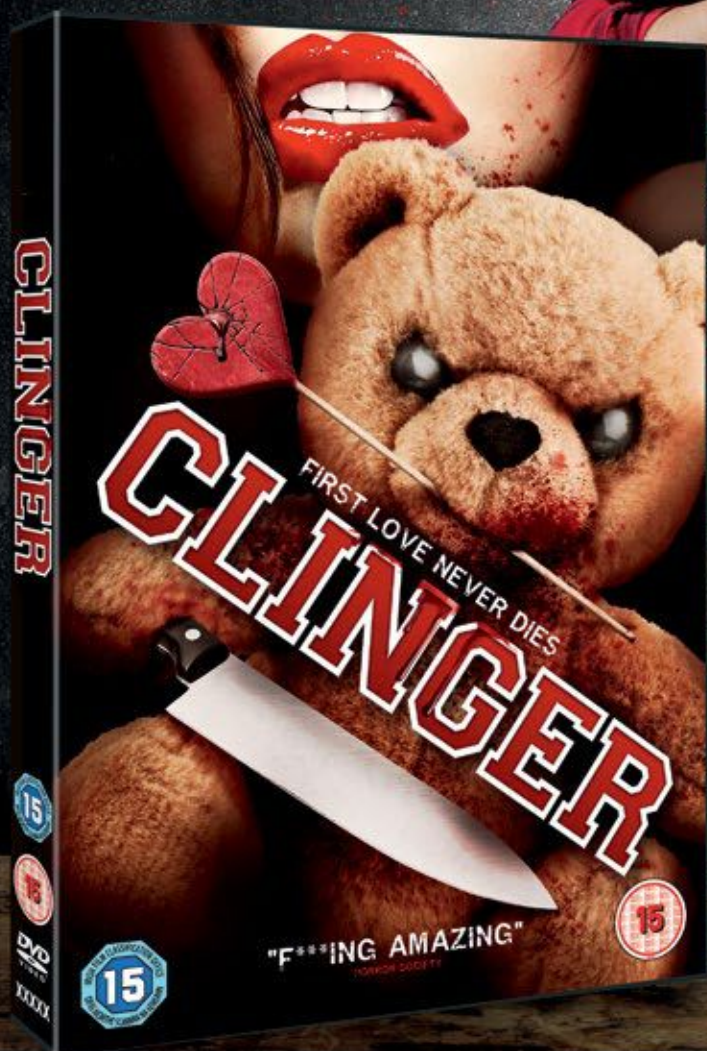
Paired with Tim Jacobus' cover art, this is an iconic story starring *Goosebumps*' most memorable villain. Twin sisters Kris and Lindy are the first to find a dummy with a chipped lower lip, and they give the sad thing a name: Slappy. But Slappy isn't pathetic at all; in fact, he is every horrible thing we have ever thought about dolls. He is alive. And he is out to get you.

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IN THE STUDIO WITH CHURCHILL

By
Tony Jones

One of the great things about audio dramas is the ability to expand on established properties, focus on peripheral characters and give them exciting new stories. Which is what BIG FINISH has done with the DOCTOR WHO version of a certain British Prime Minister...

As Big Finish announce wave after wave of titles based on the modern (i.e. post-2005) *Doctor Who* licence, one boxset stands out from the others. Not because of any concern over how *Who*-relevant it was, more noticing how its central character had only actually appeared in a small number of well-regarded episodes. That boxset is *The Churchill Years*, a set of stories centred on Ian McNeice's portrayal of the great war leader Sir Winston Churchill. To find out more, STARBURST took a trip to a secret bunker (code name The Moat) and spoke to several of those involved. Line Producer David Richardson takes up the story: "I'm still pinching myself when I think about how much new *Who* we have!"

David sits to the side of the green room reflecting on the recent whirlwind of recordings. It's clear the addition of so many new ranges (including *Torchwood*, *River Song*, and others) has fired the imagination of the Big Finish team. Not just that, but the BBC (via Cardiff) has been equally thrilled.

"We've been working on these ranges in secrecy since September 2014... Steven [Moffat] was always keen these characters have a life beyond the TV show."

Once the decision had been made to produce *The Churchill Years*, writers were involved and scripts needed to be finalised. Matt Fitton took charge of script editing across the new *Who* ranges, and gave some insight into the creation of this particular release: "We quickly decided it was important to have a clear link back

to Victory of the Daleks. Other eras have plenty of potential but for now we've focused on this period."

Matt also explained how the idea of including stories from each of the Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh incarnations of the Doctor established the context of the boxset, but also brought its own challenges. None of the Doctors appear in person, and each is alone. To help provide some consistency for listeners (apart, obviously, from Churchill himself) the character of Hetty Warner (played by Emily Atack) takes on a role of ersatz companion in some ways.

It only takes a few moments' conversation with Ian McNeice to realise his love for the role of Churchill (whom he has played on stage, TV, and now audio) and how happy he is to be so well regarded by fans: "It's been a joy to meet the fans who look on me as Winston. Now I am their Winston."

On the subject of voicing the parts of the various Doctors, he was keen to stress this was in no way intended to be a set of impressions. The scripts give him a lot to do – he has to narrate, perform as Churchill and provide the dialogue for the Doctor. These are, in his own words, "Not impressions, but do give hints. Churchill himself wasn't an actor – though on reflection was probably a very good actor – so he wouldn't be perfect if he were telling a story including other people."

Ian puts a lot of effort into playing Churchill; for TV and stage, he shaves his head, wears a wig and makes a lot of



facial gestures. He hasn't done a lot of radio (although he has done two other Big Finish titles) and in the early part of his career shied away from it. He's made a study of Churchill's way of speaking, and has plenty to say on the topic of sibilant esses.

Writer Alan Barnes was also in studio – this was the second day of recording, and the story was *The Hounding*. This is a Tenth Doctor story, the title cleverly playing on Churchill's *Black Dog*, his name for depression. Alan wouldn't be drawn on where the individual boxset stories fitted in each Doctor's timeline, preferring to focus on telling good stories. He did a lot of research on Churchill, including studying diagrams of the gardens of Chartwell (Churchill's country home) to make sure he could accurately set his characters in a real landscape. As someone who lives in Oxfordshire, he has also wandered around Blenheim (where Churchill was born).



Like all Big Finish products, this is another well written, well directed (by Ken Bentley) and well performed project. Curiously, the release is called *Volume 1*. David Richardson was keen to stress that while this was conceived as a one-off project, talking to Matt and Alan made it clear there's a lot of potential for future releases. No word from Big Finish on this point, but there is every indication *The Churchill Years* will be another success and hopefully Ian McNeice can take to the microphone once more and tell more stories from across Churchill's life.

THE CHURCHILL YEARS VOLUME 1 will be on sale from January 31st from bigfinish.com





When SETH GRAHAME-SMITH's parody novel appeared in 2009, few expected it to be the success it was. Meshing classic literature with flesh-eating monsters and transforming prim and proper ladies into ass-kicking heroes struck a chord with audiences, however. So what can we expect from the movie version of *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES*?

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more..." or at least that's how we'll be remembering the classic quote from Jane Austen's novel after watching *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. This certainly isn't a tale of regency romance and swooning ladies in waiting. No, it's far from Jane Austen's original story, as things are about to get rather bloody in the picturesque English countryside.

Based on the reworking of the classic novel *Pride and Prejudice*, Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* saw a rather gory, blood-soaked take on Jane Austen's story, where high society isn't just fighting for their social rites of passage in the ballroom, but also for their lives as they face a constant threat from the undead, and who wouldn't want to see that unfolding on screen in the bloodiest of fashions!

When it was published, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* was a completely new take on the genre, (literally) adding some fresh meat to the classic novel with its gory twist on the story of the struggles of love and social class. It saw Elizabeth fighting for more than just Mr Darcy, introducing her as a katana-brandishing, zombie-slaying heroine, making for a refreshingly different story and bringing a whole new meaning to

OF PRIDE, PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES

by Leona Turford



Jane Austen's original tale, so it's no wonder that Lionsgate snapped up the title to bring it to the screen for what's certainly set to be a rather bloody Valentines on the day of its UK release.

It's a film that fans have been waiting patiently for, eager to see the books adaptation on the screen, but it's one that's been in the making for at least six years, as it's been in and out of development far more times than we can count. However, if the blood-soaked trailers are anything to go by, it certainly will be worth the wait to see this gory adaptation on screen. From the initial announcement of Natalie Portman taking on the leading role as Elizabeth Bennett, to Burr Steers taking over from David O. Russell as director, it's a film that's had to undergo many changes to finally come to fruition. With *Downton Abbey* actress Lily James now taking on the role of the leading lady, the wait is finally over as fans will soon get to witness the gory reimagining of the classical story.

With a leading line-up that will certainly please many fans, from Lena Headey as the brute Lady Catherine de Bourgh to Matt Smith as Mr Collins, and Sam Riley taking on the role of Mr Darcy, fans of gore splattered films and Seth Grahame-Smith's take on the classic novel will certainly be in for a treat, the movie looks set to go where other crossover genre films have often failed to reach, and should do much more justice than the adaptation of Seth's horror mash-up novel *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, just a few years ago.

"To succeed in polite society, a young woman must be many things: kind, well-read, and accomplished. But to survive in the world as we know it, she'll need... other qualities." Proving that the film goes as far from the original story as the novel does, the Bennett sisters find themselves being trained in the deadliest of arts to survive the new world that they find themselves in; a world that's been ravaged by a mysterious plague that's bringing the dead back to life.



Elizabeth and her sisters learn to live in this new world, where young women are still expected to marry off and socialise at the finest parties and balls, all whilst fighting for survival against a persistent horde of the undead, where they find themselves in a constant fight against the two clashing worlds.

It's certainly far from the original Jane Austen story, with its intertwining tales of romance, deadly battles and the woes of life plagued with zombies, but it's a blend that works together remarkably well. Who'd have thought that prim and proper ladies brandishing katanas would make for such intense viewing? Seth Grahame-Smith's twists on the original novel look set to stay intact, as Burr Steers' re-working of the original script looks set to remain true to the story. We may have had a long wait for *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* to

make it to the screen, but with the new team at the helm, it looks set to be an outstanding action-packed film.

The cast themselves couldn't be better; it's certainly a perfectly fitting role for Lily James, fresh from her work in *Downton Abbey* and *Cinderella*, bringing together both the classic role of Elizabeth, facing the trials and tribulations of regency romance, with the bloody, martial arts, zombie slaying heroine of the story. It's certainly far from her previous work, unless of course, we all missed the episode of *Downton Abbey* in which the Crawley family were set upon by a swarm of hungry zombies. But it's one that she's taken on with much aplomb, as she looks set to do the role of the katana-swinging heroine justice. With *Byzantium*'s Sam Riley starring opposite her as the dashing Mr Darcy, the pair are certainly set to keep





hearts racing on screen, not just from that infamous first meeting, but also with the incredibly intense fight scenes as they face both zombies and each other.

With an impeccable cast lined up for the film, it looks like director Burr Steers has done a remarkable job, both in saving *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* from being stuck in development hell, and on the outstanding story itself. Naturally, helped along by a talented team who have managed to keep both the Regency styling and period of the novel intact, with some outstanding bloody zombie effects to boot.

Whilst the original story may have been adapted for the screen far more times than we can count, it'll be unique to see such a gory, action-packed version of Jane Austen's novel on screen. The original mash-up was at the time hailed for its perfect blending of passion and

gore, and we'll see plenty of action on screen, from blushing Regency romance, to zombie killing mayhem. What better way to woo a lady in the 19th century than with a freshly beheaded zombie?

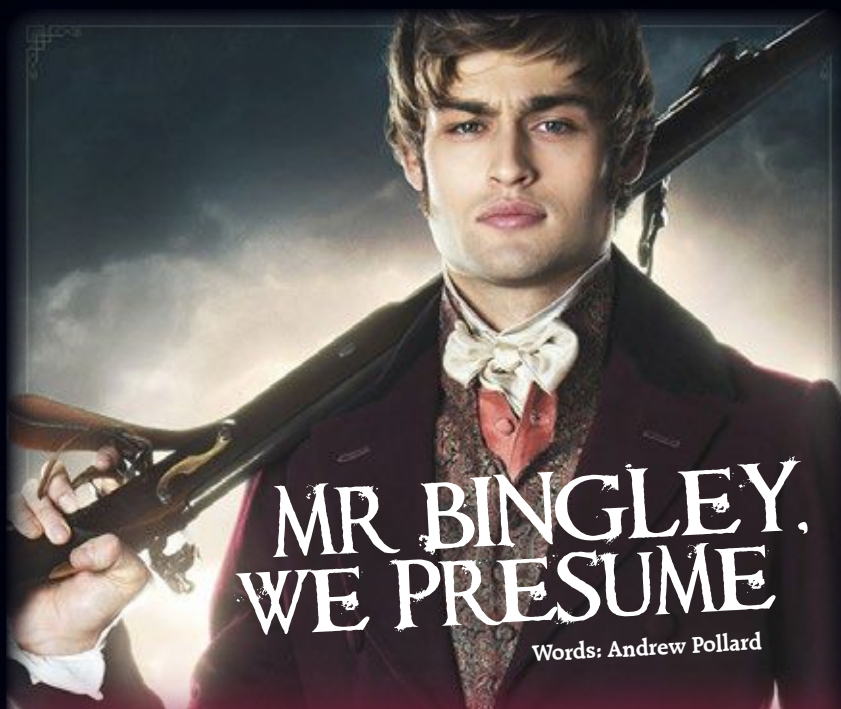
Although some may argue that its take on the classic story may seem a little gimmicky at first, it's worth noting that Grahame-Smith's novel was one of the first in a string of many crossover genre stories at the time, and one that's led the way for countless others. But for all its zombie-killing action, it's far more than that. It's a film that blends together plenty of tense scenes, with the whirlwind romance of Austen's original story still intact. Let's put it this way, you can drag your reluctant other half to watch, safe in the knowledge that while you're swooning over Mr Darcy, it will appeal to them just as much as they'll enjoy the zombie-filled scenes;

it's an added bonus if, like this writer, you gleefully enjoy the two just as much!

As for how much of the original reworked novel stays intact, we'll have to see, but if the trailers and previews so far are anything to go by, it looks set to stay close to Seth Grahame-Smith's novel, from the tense fighting scenes between Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Elizabeth, to that infamous ball scene-turned-zombie attack where Elizabeth first meets Mr Darcy.

No expense has certainly been spared in finally perfecting and adapting the novel for the screen, as it looks set to win many a naysayer over, as well as pleasing fans of the crossover story. Released in time for Valentine's Day, it certainly makes for a clever marketing gimmick, and what better way to celebrate your love than with an evening of romantic blood-soaked zombie killing?





With a big screen adaptation of Seth Grahame-Smith's much-lauded *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES* on its way in February, many are wondering what to expect from this period drama-meets-gore fest. We were lucky enough to sit down with DOUGLAS BOOTH, one of the film's stars, to discuss the film, what the shoot was like, and what other projects this uber-busy young talent has lined up on his slate.

STARBURST: How did you first get involved with *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* initially?

Douglas Booth: I got sent the script from my agent, and I was like "what on earth is this?" I'd heard about the book vaguely as it was very, very popular, especially in America, and I put two and two together and so I was keen to read it right there and then. And I really enjoyed it; it was great fun. Then I saw the cast. It was a brilliant cast that we brought together: Sam Riley, Jack Huston, Lily James, Lena Headey. It was a great cast. So I just went ahead and had an amazing time shooting it.

You've been involved previously in period pieces of sorts, such as *Romeo & Juliet* and *Great Expectations*, plus *Noah*, which is an epic sort of blockbuster movie. How did this experience differ from projects like that?

Every film sort of differs, but the really big ones like *Jupiter Ascending* or *Noah*, they're so massive! I've already said that when you make films like those then it's like building a skyscraper; you can't see the whole film until you take a couple of steps back and take in the whole thing. If you make a slightly smaller movie, you kind of can feel it and see the whole thing. You're connected to the whole thing at all times. But with this, it was just great.

Considering that *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is a PG-13 movie in the States, it

surprised us how gruesome the film is at times. Did that surprise you as well?

Well I had nothing to do with the rating. I didn't even know what the rating was until you said. But yes, I guess so. I don't know how they rate these things. I mean, if someone gets a nipple out, then it's an 18, but if you blow someone's head off then it's a PG-13. I have no idea how these things get rated or what their guidelines are. I thought the gore in this was quite fun. I'm not actually a massive fan of gore. For me, a slasher movie is probably my idea of hell. But I really enjoyed this. I thought the gore we had was gory enough for it to be real, to have a bit of guts behind it when you see these awesome girls kicking arse. When you see some of the fight scenes, when you're seeing them put their hairpins through people's faces, it had enough bite to it to be kind of cool, but without being too sickly.

And what was the personal highlight of the shoot for you as a whole?

I was thinking this on the drive in actually. I was thinking about my memories of the shoot, and they're such warm ones. They really are. We had such a lovely director, such a warm director, such a funny director. So kind. But also an ensemble cast of great people. Sometimes, films can be quite painful to make; they're hard and a bit of a slog, but we had such a great experience. This was really enjoyable, and I take wholly positive memories from it.

How did you find it trying to balance the traditional elements of the classic *Pride and Prejudice* whilst having to put such a different spin on this famed tale?

The director had already told us that the joke is that we're not winking at the cameras. The situation will be funny because it's ridiculous. To be honest, it didn't change much. As an actor, the actual reality is your reality. The reality is that we believed the black plague had spawned a zombie apocalypse and a zombie plague. That's the reality, and then it's just getting to terms with what that means. That's the reality that we'd created for ourselves.

I've never seen a movie like this one. Zombies in a period setting, with a group of women that are kicking butt? To me, that sounds so cool!

With the book itself, there's already a prequel and a sequel. Do you know if there's been any indications of a follow-up film should this one do well?

As you know with all of these things, to get a sequel it has to make quite a lot of money. So it's just a case of seeing how it does when it comes out. Personally, I had so much fun on it that if the script was good, and it would have to be good, that I'd 100% come back for another film. It would be fun.

Finally, what other projects are you involved in at the moment?

At Christmas, I was in a mini-series called *And Then There Were None*. I've got a film called *The Limehouse Golem* coming out. That's based on a Pete Ackroyd book. It's an adaptation and I'm playing a Victorian musical performer who's very complex and confused, dark and grim.

Are we right in thinking that has Olivia Cooke on board as well?

Yes! Olivia Cooke, Bill Nighy, Eddie Marsden and Daniel Mays. It's brilliant. It was such an experience, that job. It was really amazing. I got to have different teeth, I changed my face, and I played around a bit. It was just such fun. Then I've got another film called *Loving Vincent*, which is the first ever painted animation. They shot it like a real movie. There's me, Saoirse Ronan, Chris O'Dowd, Helen McCrory, and Aidan Turner. It's shot like a real movie, but then they project every single frame of the movie, 12 frames per second, on to a canvas. Then a hundred artists paint over it. It's all about the mystery surrounding Vincent Van Gogh's death. It's all done in the style of Van Gogh, so the whole thing looks like it's painted by Van Gogh. It really, really takes my breath away. It's painstakingly slow work, but I'm very excited to see that when it comes out. After doing the press work for this [*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*], I'll be playing Percy Shelley opposite Elle Fanning playing Mary Shelley [in *A Storm in the Stars*]. It's about their tempestuous love affair, they're monstrous love affair that results in her writing *Frankenstein*.

***Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is in cinemas from February 11th.**

JUNGLE JOLLIES

BY JOEL HARLEY

The Green Inferno, Cannibal Holocaust and other tales of flesh-eating terror...

It's a much-maligned subgenre of horror cinema, but the cannibal film is still as potent as ever; able to shock, repulse, and offend in equal measure. STARBURST gets peckish devouring the history and key entries from over the years...



It's been a long and torturous path - and some of us feared we might never see the day - but modern horror maestro Eli Roth's retro jungle cannibal movie *The Green Inferno* has finally been given a release date in the UK. Love or hate the man who was once Bear Jew and what he's done here, but the subgenre is long overdue its resurgence, and his enthusiasm is hard to fault. Premiering at Film 4 FrightFest in 2013 to a mixed reception, there's no denying that what the film lacks in wit or grace, it more than makes up for with its beauty (yes, beauty) and the sense of passion felt throughout. *The Green Inferno* plays like Eli Roth's love letter to the classics of the subgenre.

While *The Green Inferno*'s own problems may have been more to do with a dispute over its distribution rights than its content, it nevertheless joins a pantheon of movies renowned for their controversial nature and notorious histories. Of all of the infamous video nasties, none lives

up to their reputation quite like the jungle cannibal movies of the 1970s and '80s. Fair warning: animal lovers beware - this is not the piece for you.

From the very outset, this is a subject fraught with controversy. Unlike our Western cannibals such as the respectable Doctor Lecter, or hillbilly *Hills Have Eyes*/*Wrong Turn*/*Texas Chain Saw Massacre* freaks, the jungle cannibal is a horror villain simply inviting cries of 'racism' and dubious political correctness merit. Okay, one might argue the same thing for the denizens of Texas, but there's something inherently distasteful about accusing the humble, innocent rainforest dwellers of the world of tribal cannibalism and the like. Which is why they're usually depicted as a wronged party, egged into their crimes against humanity by deforestation, rape or brutality. In most cannibal movies, we'll find that the 'real' villains tend to be the so-called civilised westerners, unable to stop themselves from just leaving well

enough alone or simply trashing the place, like that episode of *South Park* in which Cartman runs around hitting everything with a stick. It's not quite enough to discourage accusations of racism (particularly in Roth's blunt, typically childish narrative) but it's better than the innocent-white-people-in-peril alternative.

The subgenre as we know it really began with Umberto Lenzi's *Man from Deep River* (1972). Released under the catchier monikers *Sacrifice!* and *Deep River Savages*, the film sees a rainforest photographer captured by a native tribe and forced to marry the chief's daughter. After settling into his surroundings, he then helps to protect his new family from a warring tribe of cannibals. Widely acknowledged as a cannibal-themed rip-off of *A Man Called Horse*, it's one of the weakest of the subgenre, being uneven in tone and one of the more overtly racist cannibal films out there. If it's known as 'the mother of all cannibal movies' (as





you might see plastered on its poster or DVD casing), that's only because it has the dubious honour of coming first and popularising an idea. Lenzi would go on to have a little more success with his *Eaten Alive!* (1980 - not to be confused with the rubbish Tobe Hooper feature of the same name) and *Cannibal Ferox* (1981).

The Italian cannibal feature was at its peak between 1977 and 1981, a period dubbed as 'the cannibal boom' (wannabe filmmakers take note - itself a great title for a horror film) when the Italian horror greats were at their most active. During this time, we'd see the likes of Ruggero Deodato, Joe D'Amato, Jesus Franco and Lenzi at their most productive. Deodato's *Last Cannibal World* (or *Cannibal*, or *Jungle Holocaust* or *Ultimo Mondo Cannibale*, if you prefer) came in '77, telling the simple tale of a man attempting to escape a jungle island populated by cannibals. In spite of the typically high levels of animal cruelty and nudity, *Last Cannibal World* is relatively tame compared to what would follow. He would, of course, more than make up for this relatively inauspicious start with his follow-up feature... only one of the most extreme horror movies of all time...

But first; the interim period brought D'Amato's sleazy sexploitation *Emmanuelle and the Last Cannibals* (1977) and *Papaya, Love Goddess of the Cannibals* (1978), Sergio Martino's unpleasant *The Mountain of the Cannibal God* (1978), and Sisworo Gautama Putra's *Primitives*. None of which are particularly well-remembered beyond their lurid titles, although Martino's feature, at least, stars a couple of big-name stars in Bond girl Ursula Andress and Stacy Keach.

Then in 1980, Ruggero Deodato defined a whole subgenre with his *Cannibal Holocaust*. It's a rare film that lives up to its reputation but, like the equally controversial *A Serbian Film*, *Nekromantik*, and *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, this one is every bit as horrible as you might have heard. Where most video nasties now disappoint, *Cannibal Holocaust* has lost none of its power to shock. What's less renowned, however, is the strength of the storytelling at play. Searching for a team of missing filmmakers in the Amazon rainforest, humanitarian Professor Harold Monroe (a fantastic Robert Kerman, an ex-porn

actor seeking more 'mainstream' roles) encounters two native tribes - the Yacumo and the Yanomamo - and finds both the crew (or what remains of them, at least) and reels of the film they had been making. It's essentially a film of two parts - sweaty jungle adventure movie and grim found footage horror feature. Both elements of the story work remarkably well, with Monroe's story successfully holding viewer interest for the lengthy period before any of the cannibal atrocities occur. The second half, meanwhile, may be short on actual cannibalism but is packed full of the violence and cruelty one might expect from a film with *Cannibal Holocaust*'s reputation.

Deodato, famously, had to defend himself in court over his depiction of an impaled local woman - charged with the murder of his actors live on camera, he was forced to call upon the poor dears to prove that none of them had actually died and certainly hadn't been impaled via wooden stake up the ringpiece. To be fair, the director only made it more difficult for himself by making the stars sign contracts in which they agreed to disappear for a year following the film's release, to maintain the illusion of their deaths. The murder charges were dropped, but the obscenity charges stuck.

All those poor animals that died during the making of *Cannibal Holocaust*, however, remain dead. For all of the furore over its scenes of simulated violence and sexual nastiness, the real sticking point is the decidedly real depiction of animal cruelty and murder. A coatimundi (it's a Columbian raccoon), turtle, monkey and pig were among those bearing the brunt of Deodato's artistic sadism, to the



extent where his actors would storm off set, refuse to partake and – in the case of Carl Gabriel Yorke and the pig, botch their lines during lengthy monologues. What we have here is a series of sequences that will have any meat eater eyeing the Quorn for days afterward, even now. Indeed, as our filmmaking has become more manufactured and safe, so scenes of animal murders of the '70s and '80s have more power to shock than ever. It's impossible to imagine any filmmaker doing the same today. Deodato has gone on to express his regret over these scenes, as he has much of the movie's content. Versions with the animal cruelty cut out are available, but you'll always know it's there, no matter how well-hidden it is (not very if Shameless' Blu-ray cut is anything to go by).

Unfortunately, animal murder and jungle cannibalism seem to go hand in hand, to the extent where the ethical horror consumer will have trouble finding any without. Whether you watch a cut version or not, there's always the knowledge that an innocent wee creature (or ten) died for the making of your *Cannibal Holocaust*, or *Mountain of the Cannibal God*, the sense of guilt that you might in some way be supporting that. It's that similar prang of guilt one feels eating a steak while reading about the adventures of Batcow in *Batman* and *Robin*. It's not just animal cruelty, though (don't get us wrong – it is mostly animal cruelty, but not just that); raw, morally questionable choices are smeared all over the making of *Cannibal Holocaust*. In the 'Last Road to Hell' sequence, for example, you'll find genuine footage from Nigerian and South East Asian executions. There are the allegedly real sex scenes between Yorke and Francesca Ciardi, Deodato's "sadistic" abuse of his actors (apparently dragging Ciardi off-set and screaming at



her in Italian when she refused to bare her breasts for a scene), and the inaccurate, exploitative portrayal of the featured tribes. *Cannibal Holocaust* isn't so much a movie to watch as it is to experience.

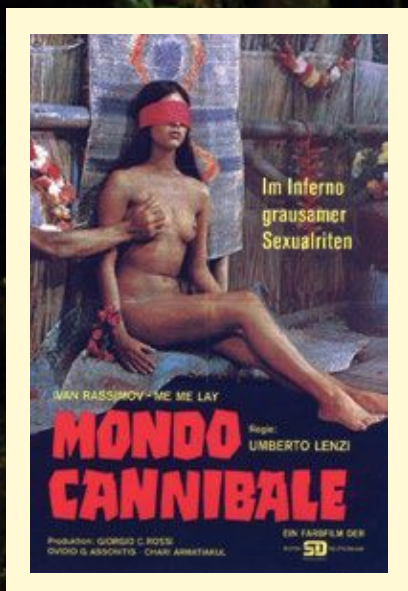
And yet, from the utterly depraved and horrific, so something beautiful emerges. Whatever one might think of *Cannibal Holocaust*, there's no denying that its soundtrack by Riz Ortolani is a resounding success. Like its verdant greenery and lovely landscapes, there's a dissonance between the horror and atrocities committed onscreen to that beautiful soundtrack, from its opening score to the faster-paced action beats and more melancholic miseries. Even if you can't stomach the film itself, the soundtrack comes very highly recommended.

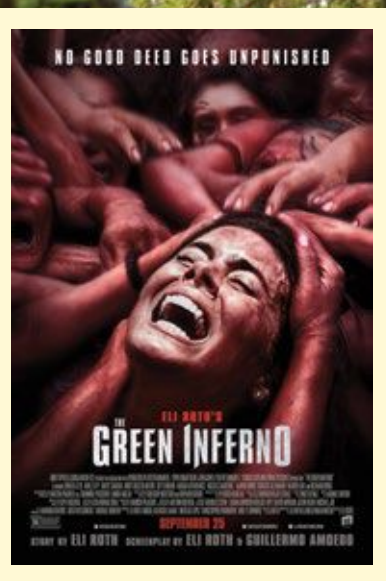
After that, the cannibal boom boomed even more with a host of imitators, pseudo-sequels, and rip-offs. Lenzi followed up with his rapey *Eaten Alive!* Robert Kerman makes a return to the subgenre along with fellow cult name Ivan Rassimov (*Man from Deep River*, *Last Cannibal World*), the former hunting the latter, a cult leader with a penchant for cruelty and sexual violence. The requisite scenes of animal abuse are present and accounted for, in addition to even more rape and castration than we've had up until this point. Lenzi continued the theme with his *Cannibal Ferox* (1981) – the story of a gang of drug dealers who use a tribe of Colombian natives as slaves for their drug business. Eventually, the natives understandably tire of this abuse of their goodwill and turn on their masters (plus visiting anthropologists) with predictably nasty results. Kerman returns, as does... you guessed it, all the animal violence and castration. Like most jungle cannibal movies, it's an unpleasant, cruel feature, redeemed by the natural loveliness of the

jungle and the technical proficiency of its gore work. It's good to see Kerman again too, even if he's reduced to a bit-part role as a New York cop. He'd shortly return to porn after this, before taking on the horror festival circuit and a tiny role as the tug boat captain in *Spider-Man* (!)

The scene continued with more of the same, to varying degrees of success. Joe D'Amato gave the subgenre another shot with his, um, *Black Orgasm* (be careful when Googling it – maybe go for *Orgasmo Nero* instead, 1980), more a silly exploitation than cannibal feature. While *Massacre in Dinosaur Valley* (1985) has no dinosaurs but, at least, there's no animal cruelty either, more like a boys' own adventure feel to it than any of the video nasties we might care to mention. Perhaps most disappointing of all is the collision of cannibals and zombies in Marino Girolami's all-bark-no-bite *Zombie Holocaust* (1979) – also known as *Doctor Butcher, M.D.* and *Zombi 3*. With massive segments lifted wholesale from *Zombi 2* (more commonly known as *Zombie Flesh Eaters*), its battle between the living dead and a local man-eating tribe is one of both subgenres' worst, featuring terrible special effects and reused footage from the earlier film. Antonio Climati's *Natura Contro* is interesting in that it was billed as a *Cannibal Holocaust* sequel and that it goes by the alternate title *The Green Inferno*. It tells an unremarkable story of a group of friends searching for a lost professor in the Amazon jungle. Widely credited with ending the subgenre, it, at least, has the good grace to (mostly, save for a blow dart and a monkey) leave those poor animals alone. No real reason to watch it, though.

Perhaps the most interesting of the cycle is Antonio Margheriti's *Cannibal Apocalypse* (1980) – a film that only





barely has a jungle in it. Cult actor, one-time Bruce Lee co-star, and roll-neck sweater enthusiast John Saxon plays Vietnam veteran Norman Hopper, one of two 'Nam survivors who returns infected with a cannibal virus that gives the plagued a curious craving for human flesh. There is some well-done gore and cannibal chow on show, but *Cannibal Apocalypse* is more slow-burning thriller than true video nasty. Its jungle-bound brothers and sisters will better serve thrill seekers looking for something nastier, but this makes for one of the era's better-told stories.

From there, the jungle cannibal movie largely petered out and died, replaced by easier-to-film and less-horrible-to-animals slasher and backwoods horror films like *Friday the Thirteenth*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Halloween*, *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and their ilk. Cannibalism became a hobby of either the American South, cultured doctors or Sweeney Todd. Jungle cannibals were still there if you looked hard enough (not recommended, in the case of *Cannibal Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death*, 1999), most notably in Bruno Mattei's *Cannibal Ferox 3* (aka *Land of Death* aka *In the Land of the Cannibals*) and *Mondo Cannibal* (aka *Cannibal World* aka *Cannibal Holocaust 2*), both made in 2003. Referred to as the 'Italian Ed Wood', Mattei didn't exactly set the world on fire with these lacklustre faux-sequels, but at least he tried (tried ripping off the plot of *Predator*, that is). Meanwhile, Jonathan Hensleigh brings the found footage back in the unmemorable *Welcome to the Jungle* (2007) – no, not the one with *The Rock*, nor the one with Jean-Claude Van Damme – a typical low-budget release in which young filmmakers go into the jungles of New Guinea looking for one thing (a missing millionaire) but find something else

completely (cannibals). Their efforts are appreciated but ultimately worthless. Jungle animals can breathe easy – one would be hard-pressed to recall a single decent jungle-bound cannibal movie since the '80s. No, *Turistas* (2006) doesn't count.

There's a sense, perhaps, that the jungle cannibal film is a subgenre very much of its time. After all, we no longer live in a day and age where it's appropriate to go around accusing tribes of people of eating each other – and God forbid you should kill an innocent animal on camera (the creepy crawlies of *I'm A Celebrity* notwithstanding; they're apparently free to eat all the bugs and insects they like). And rightly so. Times change, otherwise we end up living a world of accepted racism and animal cruelty, just like the *Daily Mail* would be absolutely fine with (you know, if you're an 'immigrant' or one of those foxes they don't mind being hunted). For a more humanist take, we'd recommend the documentary *Keep the River on Your*

Right: A Modern Cannibal Tale (2000) or the 1969 memoir by Tobias Schneebaum upon which it is based. Don't expect much gut-munching though: it's more ponderous than that, asking just who the real 'savages' are, without resorting to turtle murder for emphasis.

Still, that's not to say that the subgenre isn't missed, and shouldn't be reinvented for our modern age. This is what Eli Roth has attempted with his *Green Inferno*, and should be lauded for, however you feel about the fellow. Even better: he's managed to do so without murdering half of the Amazon rainforest in the process.

Now, if you don't mind, we're off for a little salad while donating money to a turtle charity or something. We'd say that no animals were harmed in the writing of this piece but... well, *Cannibal Holocaust* was watched during the research process...

THE GREEN INFERNO is out now on DVD.



CHECKING IN TO CHECK OUT

by Andrew Pollard

In a genre that's so often dominated these days by remakes, reboots, redos, reimaginings, reawakenings or whatever the current term of the month is, ELI ROTH's *HOSTEL* burst on to the scene in a big way with a film that struck so many chords with horror hounds of yesterday whilst introducing a new audience to what proper horror is all about. So sit back with us, cover your eyes, and let us guide you through the history of the famed (and totally disgusting-yet-brilliant) franchise.



HOSTEL

Refreshing the Genre

To this simple writer for the greatest magazine in the galaxy, the first *Hostel* holds a special place in my heart. It was a random Tuesday in March way back in 2006, I was stuck in a mundane job that was simply getting in the way of the things I loved: mainly films. As such, an offer from my bestest of best pals to pull a sickie and check out this new offering from Eli Roth was one I simply couldn't say no to. And so, after the worst 'sick' voice you could imagine, I got myself along to watch *Hostel*... and it was the most uncomfortable experience I'd ever had in a cinema. And yes, I'm a man who's sat through *Scary Movie 4*, *Terminator Salvation*, and the heart-breaking disappointment of *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* (seriously, we'll skip that one, it's still too raw).

If you read this fine, fine publication, chances are you love yourself some horror, but by the turn of the millennium what really constituted horror? Films like *Ginger Snaps*, *Valentine*, *The Others*, *The Ring*, *Freddy vs. Jason*, and *Saw* all had their plus points, but by and large the horror genre was falling

into a murky hole of repetitiveness. From the depths, though, stepped *Hostel*.

Whilst many of the horrors of years gone by were formulaic, generic, and, most importantly, safe, Eli Roth's *Hostel* was what fans were craving; it was vile, disgusting, bloody, traumatic, and an experience that left you shook up and crying for your mommy. Roth, hot off the success of *Cabin Fever*, had well and truly made his mark in the horror genre, and what a grotesque and brilliant mark it was.

Forget all of the repetitive, played-out, shock-for-shock's sake fodder that followed, *Hostel* well and truly made torture porn cool and firmly put that element of horror on the map. Yes, maybe you can also levy blame at *Hostel* for leading the way for so much of the dross that tried to mirror it, but Roth's movie was a refreshingly tormented movie in a genre that had long gone stale.

Starring Jay Hernandez, and briefly Derek Richardson and Eythor Gudjonsson, 2005's *Hostel* focused on a black market of sorts, which centred on the torture of human beings of different nationalities.



Ever fancied torturing an American? Sure, there's a price for that. Fancy tormenting a Japanese person? Again, there's a price for that. Ever wanted to brutalise a Brit? Hand over your coins, for there's a price on that, too. *Hostel* opened a world of a seedy underground trade that saw people able to bid on the chance of torturing people of a certain nationality, exploring the notion of how people really craved the ability to torture their fellow man and even allow racial/sexist aggression to be explored. It was brutal, unashamed, and hard-hitting in every single way; that first *Hostel* provided many of the most disgusting moments this self-proclaimed horror hound of a writer has had the (dis)pleasure to watch on the big screen. On face value, yeah, it was torture for the sake of torture, but there was such an undercurrent narrative where *Hostel* was concerned. Many may struggle to see past the splatter and the truly horrible moments, but Eli Roth concocted a film that was laced in social commentary that maybe hit a little too close to home for some when explored in depth.

Plot-wise, the first film saw three backpackers end up in Slovakia, where they were lured in by curvaceous, luscious ladies, only to then end up as prey and victims for a group known as the Elite Hunting Group. One by one our central characters are offed... bar Hernandez's Paxton... well, for now.

With its literally pants-shittingly scary tale, *Hostel* managed to take home a solid \$80 million dollars from a budget of less than \$5 million, which of course set the alarm bells ringing when it came to the possibility of a remake. And rightly so, for Roth's *Hostel* had given the horror genre as a whole a much needed kick in the nuts. This was a man determined to change the game, or at least freshen it up, and with *Hostel* he did just that, no matter how disgusting and brutal it was to watch.

Revisiting the Trauma

With Eli Roth back at the helm, *Hostel: Part II* arrived in 2007 and flipped the script a little, this time spending equally as much time with the torturers as the torturees (if that's even a word). Elaborating more on the Elite Hunting Group, we saw how the process of finding someone to

torture actually worked. We saw potential killers enter in to bidding wars on their smartphones, tablets and laptops, all looking to get the chance to live out their fantasies of killing their fellow man. It was creepy, eerie, but it also made this sequel stand out amongst the sea of dull, played-out, repetitive follow-ups that were out there.

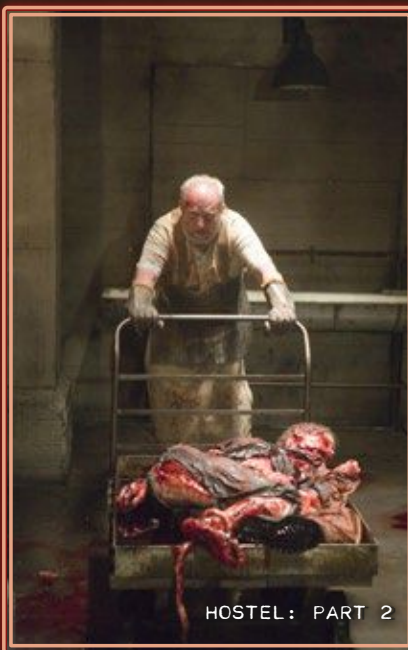
For better or for worse, *Hostel: Part II* was a very different film, exploring the angle of both the victims and the would-be killers of this horrific premise. Despite taking an alternative path to its predecessor, Roth made sure to cram the movie full of gore, tension and terror (particularly a scene involving a dog and a severed penis – a scene that makes grown men cry to this very day). Many unfairly wrote off *Hostel: Part II*, but in the pantheon of horror sequels out there it truly did something different with its premise whilst also staying loyal to its roots. In terms of modern day horror follow-ups, *Hostel: Part II* is up there with the very best purely for daring to try and take an alternative angle on the premise established in the original. When it came to the ever-

important dollar-dollar, *Hostel: Part II* never quite hit the heights of its predecessor, taking home a so-so \$35 million from a \$10 million budget. As such, it would be a little bit of a wait before any future *Hostel* films.

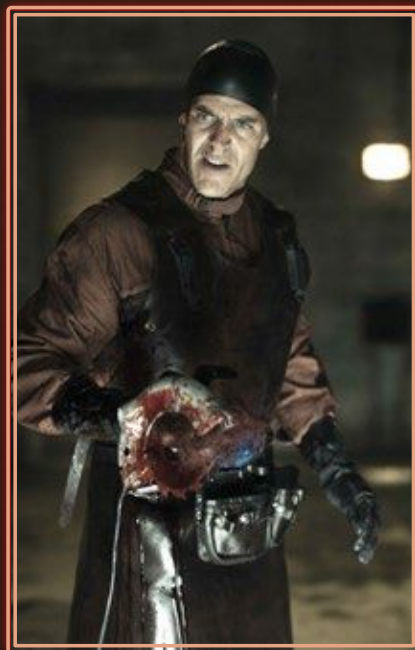
Straight-to-DVD Horror

Fear not, though, for *Hostel: Part III* did finally arrive in 2011. By this point, the franchise was in the realm of direct-to-DVD fodder, yet this didn't stop the third *Hostel* being more enjoyable than it had any right to be. Directed by Scott Spiegel, *Hostel: Part III* was again something different from a franchise that had the worry of easily becoming formulaic and paint-by-numbers.

This time out, the action centres on a stag party in Las Vegas. Whilst a million miles away from the murky antics of Slovakia, that doesn't stop this group of drunken lads falling in to a dark corner from which they cannot escape. After they're drawn in by some sexy, scantily-clad ladies (because aren't they all in these films?), things soon take a predictable turn for the worse. Far from



HOSTEL: PART 2





HOSTEL: PART 3



following the usual plodding formula, *Hostel: Part III* actually puts a different spin on tales of yesteryear as the plot twists and turns whilst staring squarely at a group of partying-hard sorts and ultimately questioning their quest for excess and pleasure.

Being a straight-to-DVD effort, *Hostel: Part III* was always going to take home less coin than its two predecessors and that was, indeed, the case. What was a real shame, though, was that the final leg of this trilogy didn't get to run ragged on the big screen like the earlier outings. Sure, by that point there may not have been the clamour for a third *Hostel* film, but the end result was surprisingly (and refreshingly) different and well-crafted, with director Spiegel creating a film that was faithful to the two *Hostel* films that went before it, yet put a totally different spin on the formula audiences had come to expect by that point.

The *Hostel* series as a whole is one that, like it or not, breathed fresh life into the horror genre when it was dying on its arse. Eli Roth had made an impressive debut with

Cabin Fever, but it was with the first *Hostel* that he really made a solid impression and made the world stand up and take notice as he delivered a film that was equally as terrifying as it was disgusting. Simply put, he cemented his reputation with *Hostel* after making a name for himself with *Cabin Fever*. Since then, Roth has gone on to become one of the foremost names in modern horror; yet he's really not done that much in terms of directing since then. That's truly testament to his work on the first two *Hostel* films; two films that injected some genuine fear, terror, and sense of abandonment into a horror genre that had gone stale.

When all is said and done, the *Hostel* trilogy is a vital part of modern horror. Whilst previous decades may have been ripe with franchises like *Halloween*, *The Omen*, *Friday the 13th*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, it's wrong to overlook *Hostel* when it comes to looking at greats of their time. Whether the films made your stomach turn or not is irrelevant yet also part of the point: *Hostel* was a

monumental step in horror cinema and it's a franchise that deserves to be revered with the great names of yesteryear.

We may all have those mates that scoff at the notion of sitting down to watch *Hostel: Part II*, and especially *Hostel: Part III*, but by the time those naysayers have been put through the wringer of either of those sequels they'll soon realise just how shocking, brutal, effective, and, most importantly, impactful those films are.

Regardless, the *Hostel* trilogy will go down as a staple of modern horror cinema, and rightly so. Even to this day, certain scenes make you look away and go to your happy place. And when all is said and done, isn't that the sign of something truly special within the horror genre? Either way, you won't catch us checking into a real-life hostel any time soon. Well, you can't be too careful now, can you?

★
HOSTEL: PART II and *HOSTEL: PART III* screen on HORROR CHANNEL as part of their EXTREME season in January. SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70 and Freesat 138.



"YOU HAVE TO SEE THIS! ONE DAY SOMETHING WILL GO WRONG AND YOU WANT TO BE ABLE TO SAY YOU WERE THERE WHEN IT DID!" - Graham Norton

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| TRURO Hall For Cornwall | 01872 262 466 | 27 APR | hallforcornwall.co.uk |
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PANDORICA SET REPORT



TRIAL BY FIRE

BY THOMAS WINWARD

STARBURST spends a night on set of a new sci-fi thriller where we will undergo the leadership trials of The Varosha Tribe. This is PANDORICA...



It's dark. The sun set long ago, and the night is growing cold. But there's movement in the creaking woods. Shadowy figures flit between skeletal trees, ragged clothes snagging on branches. A scream rings out through the black, and the figures race to where a young man lays in the dirt, his leg ensnared in a vicious bear trap. Cruel, sharpened stakes dig into his flesh and he writhes and wails as his companions fight to free him.

Then another man steps forward. Tall, with fashionable, close-cropped hair - and a cup of coffee. He pauses, takes a sip, and is satisfied. 'Cut!' he cries. The figures get up off the ground and the victim relaxes. Young women reapply the tribal paint on their faces. It's a sudden reminder that we're not in a post-apocalyptic world where young members of a tribe are challenged to claim the title of leader. We're in a paintball arena, in some woods in Billericay.

Essex is, admittedly, not as exciting as Varosha. But the production teams of The Film Label and Shattered Mirror Productions have been working around the clock to turn this unsuspecting corner of suburbia into the set of their sci-fi horror *Pandorica*, due for release in 2016.

The film focuses on three members of the Varosha Tribe - Erien, Ares and Thade. They journey from their home towards a dark forest with their current leader Nus. It is here they take part in an age-old tradition where Nus will choose his successor - but they encounter something they did not expect.

Local filmmaker Tom Paton spearheads the small team as the film's writer and director, and it's clear he oozes passion for the project. But how exactly did it all come to fruition?

'This was born out of frustration,' he explains during a rare break from filming. 'I'd worked up quite high making commercials, and I met Mirror Productions. They'd actually optioned





Endemic, a totally different script of mine - one that was very personal to me - and I hope we make it one day. But that was the traditional route. We went to Cannes, spoke to investors... and the whole time I was thinking: *there's a better way of doing this*. It's a model that doesn't fit the type of filmmaker that I am. So, *Pandorica* was a frustration script. I'm a bit of a tech-head, and I wrote the script with this camera in mind. I threw everything at it: my fashion, my interest in make-up; I'm a huge John Carpenter fan, but I also like historical pieces and was looking for a way to meld them together. Two weeks later, we had a finished script.'

The technology is certainly integral to the film. Taking place almost entirely at night, the crew are filming with the Sony A7S, famed for its unusually high 20,000 ISO. Tom ponders for a moment then decides that yes, this will be the first full-frame, 4K, ultra-low-light feature film.

It's not totally dark. An enormous glowing helium balloon does a fine

job of casting moonlight on the set, and campfires and flaming torches frequently create a beautiful focus in the scene. George Burt, *Pandorica*'s Director of Photography as well as one of its producers, enjoys the challenge of filming in such low light conditions. 'It's down to the camera,' he explains proudly. 'A year ago, this film couldn't have been made on this budget.'

The low budget and small team is something the crew are keen to emphasise. With limited sets and only six characters, the production feels low budget. There aren't big special effects sequences, extensive stunts or a prolonged post-production period, but the results speak for themselves. The footage on the monitor looks fantastic. It's clear how excited Tom is about this. He speaks with the hurried words of someone whose mind is constantly whirring and spewing out ideas. 'Film is changing,' he says. 'It's democratised. Look at a film like *Tangerine* that was showing at Sundance - the whole thing

was shot on an iPhone 5. Now anybody with talent and vision can go out and shoot a movie.'

But with the availability of technology these days, is he worried his work won't stand out and get noticed? 'I think it's exciting. Now it comes down to storytelling. Are you a good storyteller? Now there are kids making things in their dad's garden that looks like it costs a million quid but actually cost forty pounds they got from a paper round, and I'm excited to see where that takes us.'

Despite the darkness, the cold, and the spooky tone of the set, the crew have a wonderful rapport that comes across in their work. Everyone seems genuinely excited to be there and fully on board with the story and the script. The gaffer, another Tom, stands to the side with a permanent smile on his face. 'It's great working on small productions like this,' he beams. 'There are no egos. Everyone's working towards a common goal.'

In the woods, a heavily-tattooed young woman - the heroine of the piece



- spits off some angry dialogue at an antagonist before sitting down to chat with STARBURST. Director Paton is convinced that Jade-Fenix Hobday will be a huge star. Posting some images on the Internet catapulted Hobday into a modelling career, and now *Pandorica* is her first film.

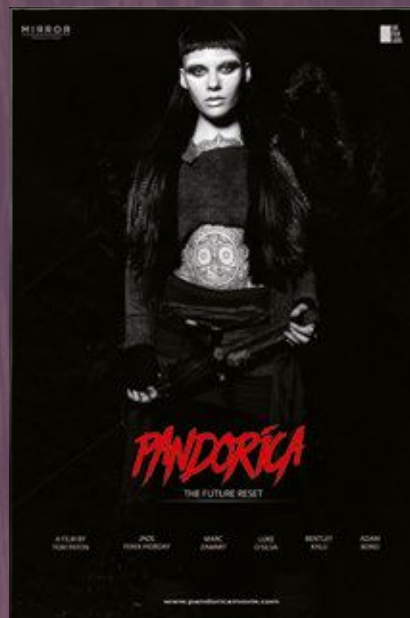
'It was crazy. Tom told me about the film, he'd seen the way I look. I hadn't done any acting before but I liked how there wasn't much dialogue - it's all in the facial expressions and the actions. I went to the casting and obviously did something right.' Jade's first feature film experience has obviously been a good one. She's wide-eyed and enthusiastic about the future. 'It's been an amazing experience and I'm really sad to be leaving. But as this door closes, another one opens. I have a lot of travelling to do for a shoot in the next couple of months, around Europe and then LA.'

As the demanding shoot draws to a close, the cast and crew say goodbye to *Pandorica*. But it's probably not

the end. Mirror Pictures' producer Evangelo Kioussis is confident the universe has a life outside of this film. Sequels, prequels, spin-offs, graphic novels. He reels them off a list, eyes glinting, stopping just short from saying *franchise*. 'There's plenty of room in this world,' he says, 'and it's one of the things that drew me to the project in the first place. It would even be great to bring other writers and directors in to explore this world.'

And what about Tom and the rest of the crew? What's next for them? The writer/director shrugs. 'Do you know what? I have no idea. *Endemic* maybe. That's a totally different kettle of fish. I'm open at the moment. I just like to keep doing what I'm doing, and pushing boundaries. Pushing boundaries and winding people up.'

PANDORICA is currently in post-production and will be released later in the year. Keep up to date by checking out the website pandoricamovie.com.



FRIGHT ON DEMAND

WORDS: MARTIN UNSWORTH

Not content with running one of the world's premier horror film festivals, the team behind London's FRIGHTFEST have partnered with ICON Distributors to provide a stream of content for the burgeoning video on demand market. The first six titles were made available late last year, with more on the way in the first quarter of 2016. We quizzed ALAN JONES and PAUL MCEVOY about what fans can expect from the venture...

STARBURST: How did the idea for FrightFest Presents come about?

Alan Jones: Well, we had done similar things before, once with Revolver when they were in operation, and we had a vague sort of plan to do something like this with The Wild Bunch, who were a European distribution arm. It's really only snapped into focus properly because Icon really understand what FrightFest is all about and they realised we could identify titles that might have slipped through their net. They were looking for bigger releases really. Because we have that elimination process already with the submissions and we go around the festivals and see what we want, and we know what our audience wants to see within the FrightFest wall. They said

'why don't you mention to the filmmakers that you'd like to release them on VOD, and possibly physical if it proves popular' and that's how it all came about. It's mainly because Icon know FrightFest, they believe in what we do and they could understand that we could recognise those niche types that would have an audience - not necessarily a big one for them to warrant releasing theatrically like *It Follows* or *The Guest* - for this sort of platform.

Paul McEvoy: We keep our ears, noses, and eyes to the ground all the time finding brand new films to show at the various events we hold around the country. It just felt like the natural progression when we were approached by Icon Film Distributors to launch a label. After a lot

of consideration, we decided they were the best company to go with to do this new venture. Obviously, they had great genre success with a lot of their titles: *It Follows*, *The Babadook*, *Cold in July* to name but a few recent ones. They have such a love and passion for genre films, same as we have.

The films are pretty much the pick of the indies from FrightFest, is supporting that talent the driving force and making sure the films are given an audience outside of the festival circuit?

PM: Yeah - absolutely, that's crucial. We're always looking for interesting, innovative genre pictures for the festival that then translates into the label.



AJ: A film like Steve Oram's AAAAAAAH! would have, I think, found its own way out there. Luckily, we saw that pretty early on and suggested to Steve 'why don't we use this for FrightFest Presents?', and that's the way he wanted it released. It's a case of what the filmmakers themselves want, as well. In Steve's case, he didn't want it to go wide, or a massive release; he wanted to nurture it. In a way, we sort of realised this could probably do the best for him in that department. There's always a reason for the films that we've chosen. I'm really happy with the way it's worked out.

Having the deal with Icon is great; they're a well-known boutique label, a lot of people want their films with them, and it makes our job easier going in and saying 'we've got this deal with Icon'. They immediately know what they're dealing with, and what the capabilities of that particular company are. Since we've been absorbed into their operation, both Paul and I have been so impressed with the way they deal with things, the professionalism and way they are, we just love working with them, which is essentially what it's all about.

The reason this sort of thing has failed before is people wanted to harness the FrightFest way of looking of things, they never really went with it. They'd say they understand, but 'we don't think this...' But apparently, you didn't want to use us because of the way you think, you wanted to use us for the way we think. Icon just leaves us alone to do what we do best and vice versa.

Do you see the VOD market increasing?

AJ: I think it has to; I'm astonished that we're quite slow here to do it. Really, DVD is hanging on – it's the last gasp – they've been predicting the demise of that particular format for years now, and people have got it wrong because people are still holding on to it. Companies like Arrow are making the most of that too, with their excellent collectors' editions, which are probably the way that's going to go. But we are really slow compared to the States, so it can only improve. We are a couple of years behind what's going on in America. It really will get better as people get more educated



about the way to do this. Most people think that they can't get a physical copy; we can easily do that if that's what you want. It's a case of educating the audience to accept this way of viewing things. Netflix and those sorts of things are helping, so sooner or later it'll happen.

PM: Hopefully, it'll follow the same pattern as in America where it's really taken off. The first bunches of titles are exclusively available on VOD, but we're looking at releasing digital products. So hopefully all of them, or at least some, in the New Year. The VOD model is something that we're excited and passionate about, and obviously, it's still in quite an early infancy in the UK. But we do still regard physical items and beautiful editions as another potential for the FrightFest Presents label, so we're not discounting that. At the same time, we're not discounting limited theatrical releases potentially.

Will you be looking to license films that you haven't been able to programme at FrightFest?

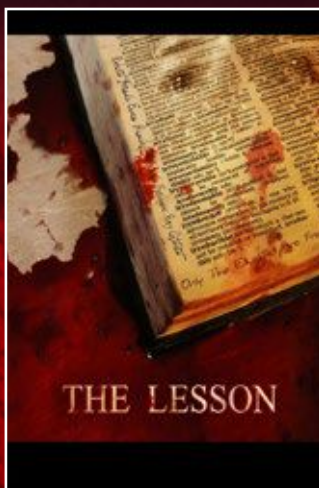
AJ: Oh absolutely, that's part of it! We just thought – and it makes business sense, doesn't it – to be able to give it that

sort of push to begin with to keep in the confines of the festival and then release afterwards. But that isn't a done deal, that's not necessarily the way it's always going to work. So if something is out there that we think 'OK, we couldn't programme this because someone else had it before us, etc.', I'm sure it would work out 80% like that. We would actually look at other stuff as well. We're forging a good identity with FrightFest Presents, everyone's come to us and they think what we've done is a really good thing. Basically, what I don't want is for people to think VOD = complete rubbish. I just want people to think that there is a quality there, and these films are worth seeing. If we endorse the films in that way, we're providing that valuable service.

PM: There's no hard and fast rule on this; some of the movies will have been shown at the festival, but that's not the template, there's nothing set in stone. It doesn't have to be films that we're showing or have shown at FrightFest.

What do you see for the future of FrightFest Presents?

AJ: It's all about building a catalogue, we're not in this for the short haul, and it's not just about the first day the films are



all released. It's about building the brand, and making sure people know that there's a quality level there. They can choose the ones they want to see and they will get something that perhaps they didn't expect. Hopefully, as the years go by, we'll be building up a really, really good range. I think most people are looking at it for that purpose, it's not a quick fix; FrightFest took at least six or seven years to get in the position where we became more noticed and more important. I see this as being something of the same kind of deal. Icon is happy with that. You just don't get success that fast; iTunes, Amazon, Blink Box, and stuff like that do take a while to report on figures too, so we don't have any idea either. We can't react to the market as you possibly could like at the festival, where we can put on another screening the next day if one film proves popular.

PM: We're looking into the physical releases of the titles, and if there's a breakout piece or we see something as having legs in a crowded marketplace, theatrical. We feel this is a brilliant alternative to those mainstream titles.

It's a way of getting these sorts of films out to the public, but also giving them a great profile as well, because obviously the FrightFest branding really helps with the public awareness side of things. We're looking to support first time filmmakers and also people who have made things before. It's a real mix of stuff.

Would you be interested in expanding the range to include the short films that are a festival staple?

PM: I've often thought that they would be brilliant, so let's see how the first couple of waves of titles go. We have always been a massive supporter of short films right from day one of FrightFest, we've shown an extraordinary array of them. We've always supported that aspect. That's an interesting thing, and maybe that'll be something we look to do in the future.

FRIGHTFEST PRESENTS films are available through all popular VOD outlets including iTunes, Amazon, Google Play, Blinkbox, TheHorrorShow.TV, and Virgin Movies.

FRIGHTFEST PRESENTS

Already available from FrightFest Presents are:

Isaac Gabaëff's fun monster flick *THE SAND, AFTER DEATH*, in which a group face their own personal purgatory, zombie apocalypse comedy *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEB*, Steve Oram's bizarre AAAAAAAAH!, dark family drama *ESTRANGED*, and Adam Egypt Mortimer's fantastically gory *SOME KIND OF HATE*.

A further six films are added to the roster soon:

February 29th

THE LESSON - written and directed by Ruth Platt, a teacher is pushed to the limit by a disruptive pupil, in a film that's as thought provoking as it is horrifying.

LAST GIRL STANDING - an intriguing look at what happens to the survivor of a brutal massacre.

March 7th

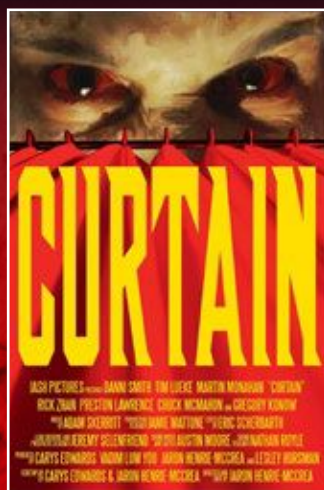
LANDMINE GOES CLICK - a terrifying situation - standing on a live mine - is made worse when a psychopath takes advantage of a man's predicament by torturing and abusing his girlfriend.

CURTAIN - a sci-fi horror in which a woman's shower curtains keep disappearing into another dimension has got to be worth a look, right?

March 14th

THE UNFOLDING - an exciting slant on the haunted house trope that also incorporates an impending nuclear disaster.

EMELIE - guaranteed to not only send chills down every parent's spine, but also make sure they never hire a babysitter again.



TALES OF BARDIC FURY

A psychedelic mix of Asterix and Father Ted
Steven Walsh, Gosh Comics

Gloriously silly, funny and gorgeous to look at, I
highly recommend giving this book a go.
If These Books Could Talk



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A MAINSTREAM FREAKOUT

BY ED FORTUNE



BEYOND THE VALLEY OF THE DOLLS, a cult classic that rocked the world when it came out in 1970, continues to impress audiences to this day. Let's take a fond look at this unique movie...

To the average movie-going fan, the name Russ Meyer is synonymous with campy movies, big breasted women and of course, *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*. The cult movie director's filmography reads like a greatest hits of softcore exploitation movies, including cult favourites such as *Vixen*, *Mudhoney*, *Mondo Topless*, and *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* Meyer dedicated his life to mercilessly skewering American values, so much so that his tombstone (he died in 2004) reads 'King of The Nudies' and 'I Was Glad to Do It'.

The '70s musical melodrama *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* is easily his best-known movie, and his only 'mainstream' movie, for a given value of mainstream. 20th

Century Fox was looking to capitalise on what we now call the 'counter-culture' era, a time when the youth of America were told to tune in, turn on and drop out. This period inspired movies such as *Easy Rider* and *The Trip*, and though, by the 1970s, the whole thing was starting to collapse under the great weight of people looking to cash in, Fox was still determined to exploit the genre for every cent. Fox had already commissioned and distributed *Valley of The Dolls* in 1967. Though it was a commercial success, the movie (which is based on Jacqueline Susann's incredibly successful novel of the same name), was universally panned by critics. *Valley of The Dolls* tells the tale of three young women who head out into the big city to make something of their lives, only to become





addicted to alcohol and prescription drugs (known as 'dolls' in the slang of the era). *Valley of The Dolls* also featured actress Sharon Tate in various stages of undress. The movie was re-released in 1969 following Tate's tragic murder and was yet again very successful.

Fox's fortunes were at an all-time low, and they were willing to do whatever needed to be done to stay afloat. The execs wanted a sequel to *Valley of The Dolls*, and Meyer had a reputation for creating movies that appealed to the demographic Fox wished to exploit. What they desired was something of a sequel, but with more blatant titillation and scandal. The original pitch was for more of the same, but slightly racier. What they got was a scathing parody of the state of American culture, written by world famous film critic Roger Ebert. Meyer was aware at the time that this might be his only chance of having a shot at a big budget movie, and requested that Ebert produce something the critic would later say 'should simultaneously be a satire, a serious melodrama, a rock musical, a comedy, a violent exploitation picture, a skin flick and a moralistic expose'. It's certainly that. The movie was so detached from the original brief that Fox had to flyer most of the publicity material with a note saying 'This is not a sequel - there has never been anything like it.' They weren't kidding.

The plot starts off along familiar lines; we have three young women - Kelly Mac

Namara (Dolly Read), Casey Anderson (Cynthia Myers), and Petronella 'Pet' Danforth (Marcia McBroom). Fresh-faced and fairly naïve, the charismatic Kelly had formed a rock band with her friends (the band is called The Kelly Affair because it's all about Kelly). The girls begin as all sweetness and light, though this swiftly changes when the group heads to LA to find their fortune and to hook up with Kelly's rich Aunt.

After an incredibly debauched party, which features music from quintessential hippy band Strawberry Alarm Clock (who pretty much play all their hits in this movie), the girls are exposed to the flamboyant and eccentric Ronnie 'Z-Man' Barzell (John Lazar), a Svengali-like manager who was allegedly inspired by Phil Spector, although Meyer and Ebert admitted later that they had not met Spector when they made the movie. Z-Man takes over from Kelly's boyfriend as their manager and renames the band The Carrie Nations. The name comes from historical figure Carrie Nation, the hatchet-faced anti-fun protestor who spearheaded alcohol prohibition in the 1900s. Subtle.

From that point on, things pretty much head on a downward spiral. Kelly's boyfriend drifts away, finding himself in bed with the predatory porn star Ashley St. Ives (Edy Williams). His story then

descends into a blend of both horror, drama, and camp comedy. Meanwhile, The Carrie Nations continue to take America by storm, despite being fuelled mostly by drink, drugs, and an awful lot of sleeping around.

It all ends in tears, of course, but in the most ridiculous of ways. The end (which we'll avoid spoiling just in case you've not seen it), starts with characters wearing costumes from the '60s TV version of Batman and ends with a brief spot of ultra-violence. The movie then attempts to deliver a moral message, despite the actual themes of the movie being nothing of the sort. It is a film about excess, fame and making very poor life choices. It's also littered with drug taking and lots of nudity, as well as some hilarious dialogue.

Each ridiculous plot twist and turn is played straight-faced.

The director knew that for the joke to work, it would have to be played straight by the actors, and this works brilliantly. Some of the acting is a little wooden, but we don't come to a movie like this





for the powerful performances.

One of the things that make *Beyond The Valley of the Dolls* so memorable is the soundtrack. Much of the score is composed by Stu Phillips, who is better known for his work on the original *Battlestar Galactica* TV series, as well as being one of the many creative minds behind *The Monkees*. The actresses in the movie were chosen for their acting and aesthetic talents, rather than their ability to sing, so all of their performances were lip-synched. Vocals were provided by Lynne Carey, who also appeared in cult TV shows such as *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* and *Wild Wild West*. Meyer would later confess to Ebert that he hoped that enough musical content would help the feature avoid the dreaded 'X' classification that would mark it out as an adult film. This plan failed completely, but it did make for an amazing soundtrack.

The legend goes that upon hearing that the movie had received an X rating anyway; Meyer attempted to sneak back into the editing room to add more nudity, mostly centred on bare-chested ladies. The studio (which was short on cash at the time) actively blocked him from doing so, as they just wanted the film out in cinemas as swiftly as possible. Fox's plan did work. For a movie made for just shy of a million dollars, the feature has grossed roughly \$40 million over the years, though this includes DVD sales and the like. Despite this, Meyer would

only get to make one more movie for Fox, the infamous clunker *The Seven Minutes*, which flopped because it simply wasn't as exciting as his first effort for the studio. Undeterred, the breast-obsessed director would go on to produce further cult movies.

Though *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* is the most popular of Meyer's movies, it's also probably the most atypical. For a start, the main characters are more stereotypically attractive, as the actresses involved were mostly known for their modelling work at the time. The director had a famous penchant for powerful, almost Amazonian women, and many of his movies feature curvy ladies who shatter gender stereotypes in a way that's kept film studies and sociology students busy for decades. Though very few would claim that Meyer's movies were feminist in tone, much of his work was as thought-provoking as it was exploitative. *Dolls* doesn't find this balance at all, being pretty much all about the exploitation from the word go.

It's a highly quotable film and has gone on to influence many media types. The Sex Pistols' Johnny Rotten even tried to re-unite Meyer with Ebert to make a punk rock movie, *Who Killed Bambi?* The feature was never finished, and allegedly, Rotten unimpressed Meyer by claiming that *Dolls* was incredibly true to life. Martin Scorsese's *The Wolf of Wall Street* has frequently been compared to *Dolls* simply because of the way it shows excess and

corruption, and, of course, the Austin Powers series of movies ape several scenes from Meyer's body of work, including *Dolls*. References to the feature are used as a badge of honour in many 'alternative' style video games, comics and indie movies.

The words 'cult classic' are over-used these days, but that's exactly what *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* is. A superior movie from an era when the *cult* aspect of filmmaking was still in its infancy. Watching the movie is a crazy hip ride and one you should go on at least once in your life.

Arrow Video release a features-packed Blu-ray edition of *BEYOND THE VALLEY OF THE DOLLS* in the UK on January 18th.



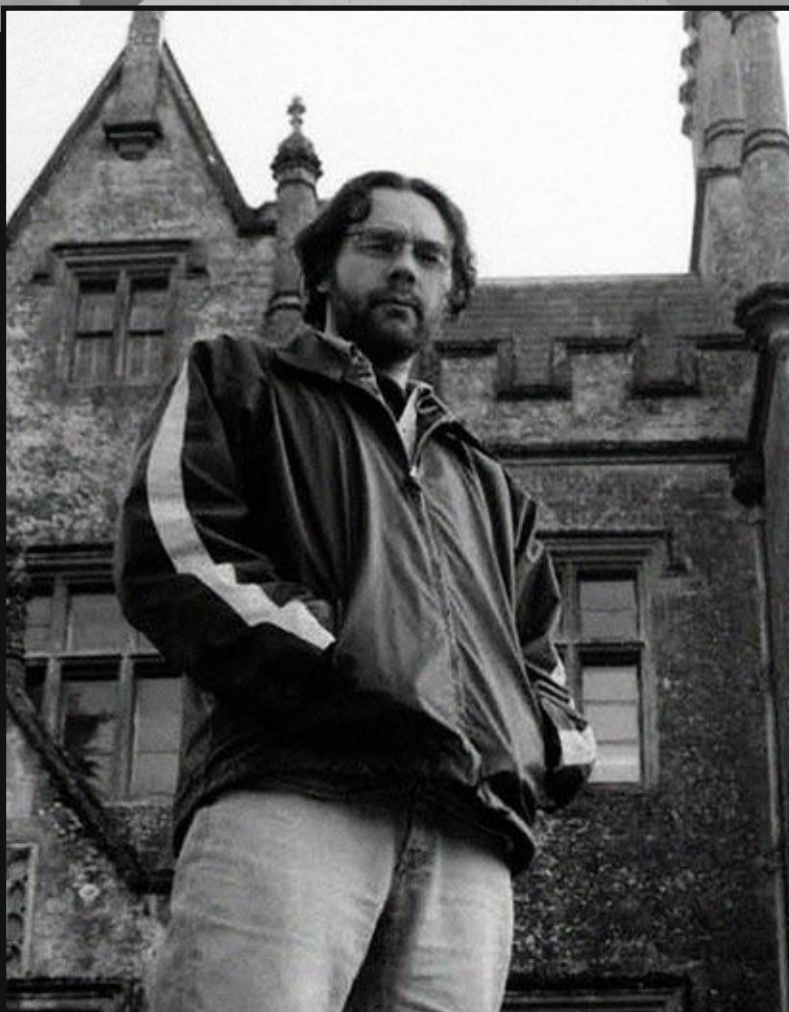


INDEPENDENTS DAY

by John Townsend

CRAIG GRIFFITH

A British independent filmmaker whose debut film *THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS* may finally be getting the attention it deserves, Craig Griffith took time out from editing his new film *THE LONG ROAD* to talk to us about filming in haunted houses and which is the best Star Wars film.



STARBURST: Regarding *Through the Looking Glass*, could you talk about the decision not to give the characters names? Craig Griffith: During the script stage, I toyed with different names but I always came back to the actual characters that they were. In the script they never referred to each other by name, so it didn't seem necessary to force the issue and come up with ones for them.

As well as the characters being nameless, there's also ambiguity with where the mysterious mirror at the centre of the film comes from.

It was very much intentional. I wanted to give the film a timeless feel; a sense that it could be anywhere and not necessarily in the present. It was a conscious decision not to be too specific so the audience couldn't entirely get a grip of where they were. It was always about putting the audience in an uncomfortable state throughout and the more supports we removed in the film, the spookier and the weirder it would be. It was also a case of trying to put the audience actually into the mind of *The Artist* as he had a breakdown.

It's a difficult film to classify into any particular genre; how you would describe it to someone?

It was always meant to be a psychological horror, but it is a difficult question. I guess the intention was always to create this alternate reality and blur the lines between that and what was going on in *The Artist's* head. We designed it not to play like a standard film and we made decisions to bring the house itself in as a character.

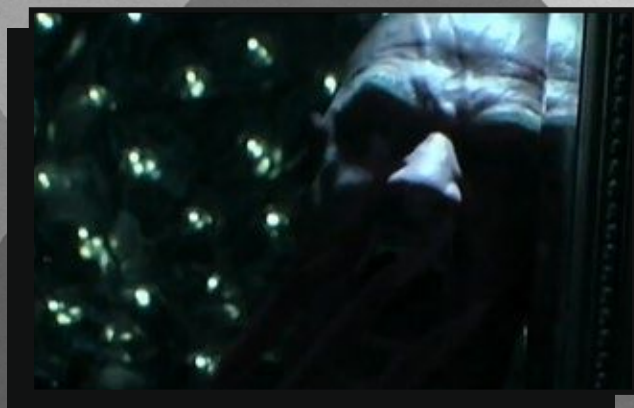
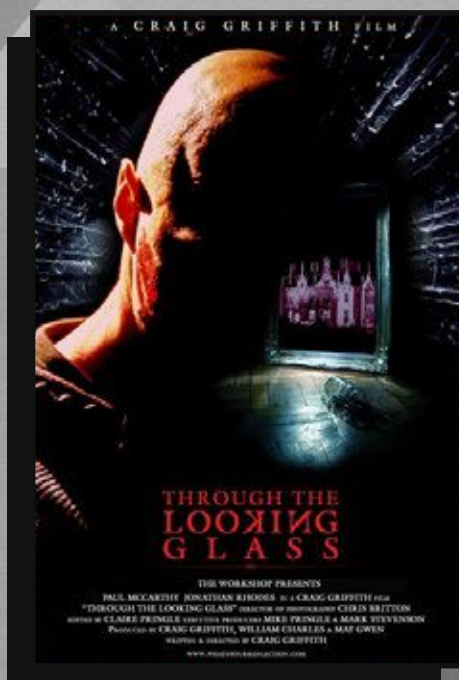
A haunted house, no less...

Yeah, it was a *real* haunted house and our intent was to lock ourselves away for forty days and see what happened. We had the bare bones of a script, but we improvised a lot around that and around the location itself. It was a little experimental and an attempt not to go for the obvious and I'd like to think we got away with it.

How long ago did you make the film?

We originally released it in 2007, but we

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS



actually shot in 2002 - so it is quite a while ago now. I was fresh out of film school and I just decided to go and shoot a film. I bought a camera and roped in a lot of friends and just went for it! The house belonged to a friend from school and we asked if we could use it and as it was about to be sold they gave us free rein. It was initially a ten-day shoot and then we just ran out of money! Gradually, we worked through it doing blocks of shooting as the house began to take its toll physically and mentally. There was no heating or hot water and we all ended up sleeping in one room as it was actually pretty scary. There were quite a few unexplained things that happened, which just added to the atmosphere of the film.

Considering *Looking Glass* was your first film, how does it feel to now have the

film gaining an audience?

It's strange, really. I love the film as I see it for the filmmaker I was at the time, and I see its faults and limitations. I suppose I'm a little sentimental, though, because of the people I made the film with and how we bonded staying together in that haunted house. I think we all went a little crazy like *The Artist* and that blended into the film. We never started shooting until about 6pm at night and then right through until 4am in the morning. It was an opportunity you rarely get, with the freedom we had at the time. It's very nostalgic for me.

You're in post-production on your new film *The Long Road*, so how different is the process now?

It was a case of going back to how we made *Looking Glass*, a kind of guerrilla filmmaking. I had this project called

Evolution Cell, which was a vampire film that originally predated the whole *Twilight* thing and vampires becoming a big deal. I was working with someone called Mark Proctor, developing the script, and it came to the point where Lionsgate were going to give us money and we also had Brittany Murphy on board. When Brittany tragically passed away, the rest of the project fell apart and it changed how I wanted to do things. Instead, I went back to basics, put *The Long Road* together and shot it in three weeks. Now we're just finishing off the edit.

How much has independent filmmaking changed, then?

If Twitter had been around when we made *Looking Glass*, I think it would have been a different thing altogether. After the experience on *Evolution Cell*



THE LONG ROAD

when there are so many factors to come together, I'm convinced that for an independent filmmaker self-promotion and distribution is the key.

Your production company is The Workshop Presents. Do you think it's essential for an independent filmmaker to have their own company today?

It started as an umbrella project when I was a film student as a way for my friends and I to move forward. We were into film and music and arts and it sounds very lofty but we didn't feel the industry had a place for us or that there was a route through to get going. I still like that mentality now, as a way of just getting on with it and doing it.

Which films in particular had an impact on you growing up?

Growing up in the seventies, very obviously

the first one was *Star Wars*. I love *The Empire Strikes Back*, but for me, *Star Wars* will always be special. My love of cinema comes from my mum, really. I remember on Fridays, I would be allowed to stay up and watch the horror season on BBC2 and the first one I remember clearly was *Them*. Even now it's so eerie, the sound and atmosphere, although the giant ants do look a little silly. And then *Jaws* and *Alien* came along. I first watched *Alien* in black and white and because of the way the film is lit, it's terrifying to watch it that way.

Many of the films you've described are creature-based and not supernatural like *Looking Glass*.

I think that influence came from *The Shining* and *The Haunting*, when not knowing what's happening is scarier than a monster lumbering around. That sort of movie relied on tone, atmosphere

and sound and that had a big influence on me as a filmmaker and was the sort of film I wanted to make. At the end of the day, horror is great fun to write and make and unlike many genres, you don't need big budgets to get them right. I just keep coming back to it and at the moment we're developing a YouTube series called TerrorTube which will be a series of 15-minute horror films. The idea is that it will be an anthology in the same vein as *The Outer Limits*, and we'll have a background character that in the next episode will be the lead. We're launching in 2016, and we're going to target guest writers and we already have Robin Ince involved, which is great. ✦

Find out more about CRAIG GRIFFITH and his films at:
theworkshoppresents.moonfruit.com



REVIEW:

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

**THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS / CERT: TBC
/ DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: CRAIG GRIFFITH
/ STARRING: PAUL MCCARTHY, MICHAEL
LANGRIDGE, ROZ POVEY, JONATHAN RHODES
/ RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

Designed as a slow-burning, psychological thriller, Craig Griffith's micro-budget *Through the Looking Glass* is a darkly interesting take on brooding madness brought on by frustration and isolation. Suffering from 'painters block', The Artist (McCarthy) welcomes his Friend (Rhodes) to keep him company at his country home. Over the next few days The Artist's mental state becomes heavily influenced by the arrival of a mysterious mirror and his Friend becomes increasingly concerned for his safety.

The real achievement of *Through the Looking Glass* is that Griffith has skilfully and subtly placed the tension and horror of the film as much in the audience's own minds as in those of his characters. So much is ambiguous; so much left to interpretation that you never fully get a handle on what is happening on screen. Emotions flux unexpectedly and characters repeatedly act 'out of character', resulting in a depth of intrigue and confusion. In lesser hands, this could have become messy and unapproachable, but through an almost distant, 'hands off' approach that gives the direction a distinctly voyeuristic feel, Griffiths has created a bleakly claustrophobic environment.

There is also a great reliance on the actors. With such a small cast (only two other characters appear alongside the leads), anyone not on their game would affect the overall atmosphere but apart from an occasional clunkily delivered line of dialogue, everyone excels. There is, to be honest, a noticeable lack of depth to the characters, their relationships and histories feeling a little superficial at times; but whether by design or by chance, this adds to the curiosity of the situation.

While a film's budget, or lack of for that matter, should never be the primary focus, with *Through the Looking Glass* it is worth mentioning again. With finances tight, Griffith and his crew have had to rely on adapting traditional filmmaking techniques to their benefit. Simplicity is the byword with lighting, design and sound all contributing to the overall aesthetic of the production.

Through the Looking Glass will get under your skin, and as much as you may need answers, they may not be readily available come the slightly formulaic finale. Taken as a whole, it is an impressive film that defies standard assessment and is proof if proof was needed that talent and skill are more important than financial freedom.



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SCREAMERS

Friday 5th

DARKNESS FALLS

Saturday 6th

THE APPEARING

Friday 12th

**WHEN A STRANGER
CALLS (2006)**

Saturday 13th

THE COVENANT

Friday 19th

SECRET WINDOW

Saturday 20th

TRUTH OR DARE (2012)

Friday 26th

THE SEASONING HOUSE

Saturday 27th

A TRUE PROFESSIONAL

BRIAN CLEMENS REMEMBERED

BY PAUL MOUNT

Last year, the hugely prolific screenwriter and television producer BRIAN CLEMENS passed away. His credits included legendary series such as *THE AVENGERS*, *THE PROFESSIONALS*, *THRILLER*, and *BUGS*. *STARBURST* spent some time with Brian's actor/director son Sam Clemens and found out more about the great man's career.

As well as being fundamental in creating some classic British TV, Brian wrote numerous episodes of cult shows like *Adam Adamant Lives!*, *The Baron*, and *The Persuaders!* Brian died in the same year as more familiar star names such as Christopher Lee, Leonard Nimoy, and his great friend and *The Avengers* icon Patrick Macnee. He also wrote several films for Hammer Films, and even directed one - the fabulous *Captain Kronos - Vampire Hunter*.

Sam and his brother George have followed in their father's footsteps and their short film *Surgery* has been rapturously received on the film festival circuit since its début at FrightFest in

August. Sam wrote the award-winning film, which was based on an idea by his father, and co-directed with it with his brother. We spoke to Sam during a touring production of his father's Sherlock Holmes stage play *Sherlock Holmes and the Ripper Murders* to find out more about the legacy of his extraordinary father and how Sam and George (a video editor by profession) are determined to keep their father's memory and formidable body of work alive.

STARBURST: Can you remember when you first realised that your father's working life as a writer wasn't quite like most kids' fathers?

Sam Clemens: It's weird, the fact that Dad wrote films just seemed normal! I think that quite quickly George and I understood that what Dad did was quite different from what other mums and dads were doing. My dad was 49 when he had me so I think the first time I really became directly involved in his work was when he wrote the pilot and was the consultant on *Bugs* [hi-tech BBC action thriller series, 1995-9]. We went on set and got to meet the actors and that was really exciting. In 1989, he was out in LA doing *Father Dowling*, *Perry Mason*, and also *Highlander 2*; we got to fly over there, got picked up in a limo, went to Universal and Disneyland and we saw *Terminator 2* being filmed at the time - it was so exciting. That was when it felt 'wow, this is what Dad does, it's really amazing!'

Although your father was involved with *The Avengers* from the beginning, it was only when he became the associate

producer in 1965 and tweaked the format slightly that the show really started to become a significant hit. Was he particularly proud of *The Avengers*?

That was the happiest time of his life because he could do whatever he wanted. I think it's still the only British show to go prime time in America. He was on *The Avengers* from the beginning, but then he was involved with the casting of Diana Rigg and the show moved into colour and was made on film rather than video. He really pushed the boundaries of what could be done. He didn't remember laughing more throughout his life than during that period. He was enormously proud and grateful for it and it was his ticket into Hollywood.

Sam Clemens as Sherlock Holmes



CAPTAIN KRONOS VAMPIRE HUNTER



What was his relationship with Patrick Macnee like?

Oh God, he and Pat were great friends. Pat was actually a nudist! They went to his house in Palm Springs once and Pat opened the door and he was stark naked! You either had to get involved or not, so all these bizarre famous people were there, completely naked! The last time Pat and my Dad spoke was last Christmas and he said 'How old are you, dear boy?' and Pat said 'Oh you're a mere child, wait till you get to my age!' because he was 93! He was a lovely man and I think that of all the people in Dad's world, Patrick and Jo Lumley [Purdey in the 1970s *The New Avengers* series] are exactly as you'd imagine them, lovely people.

Your father must have had some incredible stories about working on shows like *The Avengers* back in the 1960s.

There were so many hilarious stories he'd tell about being in Elstree because they were doing *The Saint* at the same time, so there was a lot of crossover between *The Saint* and *The Avengers* with Patrick Macnee and Roger Moore playing jokes on one another. There was one where – and I think Linda Thorson was in it at the time – someone had got at Roger in some way and put him off during one of his scenes. There was an *Avengers* scene set in a mortuary and the cast and crew had all gone for lunch and so Roger went to the set when it was empty, got into one of the coffins, stayed in there the entire lunch break until everyone came back until they were ready to roll and he just burst out and Linda nearly had hysterics. It must be out there somewhere as an outtake! There's loads of them; when they were doing scenes in the studio in the car, Roger would come running up behind them – there was a lot of humour and madness going on.

The Avengers returned in 1976 as *The New Avengers*, but, of course, times and TV tastes had changed...

Well, I think the problem is *The Avengers* isn't *The Avengers* without Patrick

Macnee and by the mid-1970s, Patrick couldn't really run around anymore, so he needed Mike Gambit [Gareth Hunt] who was basically playing his 'legs! That's why it was written that way and I think having that extra dynamic some people found not as endearing and enjoyable as the original series. And the backdrop in the second series, set largely in Canada, lost the visual flair that made the series so distinctive. But I still think much of it was bat-shit crazy and I think that as the years go by people revisit it and will look at it more favourably because it was wacky and crazy. Jo Lumley was wonderful in it and I thought the updated theme music was wonderful as well.

But in the end, they got into problems because the guy who funded it went to jail for tax fraud so for the last few episodes, all the actor's fees were being paid out of Dad and [co-producer] Albert Fennell's money; they were trying to make it fast, quick and as cheaply as they could because it was coming out of their pockets, so again that's going to affect things. Time and money affect everything!

Many readers will remember the *Thriller* series which dominated Saturday nights on ITV in the 1970s – long-form one-off dramas with intriguing twists. Did your father speak much about how the series came about and do you think time has treated it well?

Thriller came about because Lew Grade commissioned Dad to write something and when he asked what the deal would be, Lew replied 'you'll be happy with the money!' I think he just literally said to ITV 'why don't we do a series of one-hour or so TV thrillers every week?' It was that easy, so Dad just got on with the job. He wrote pretty much all of them, 43 episodes and if he didn't write them, they were based on his ideas. Even with things like *The Avengers*, every single script went through him and even if his name isn't on it, he would have rewritten it or changed bits, but if it was a new writer, he'd give them the credit because he very much wanted to help new people in the industry get on and it was the same with *Thriller*. Revisiting a lot of the *Thrillers*, some of them are fantastic; it's kind of awkward that you've got that creaky mix of video interiors and 16mm exteriors, it's horrendous when you look at it now! I think Dad was very proud of *Thriller* and over the



THE NEW AVENGERS



THE PROFESSIONALS



years, I get people coming up and telling me how terrified they were of one particular episode or how something or other really got to them or stayed with them. We don't have anything like that now.

We believe your father was still keenly creative even towards the end of his life...

The Surgery, the short film we've made, was his last idea. My friend and I wrote a horror film called *The Still*, which we're still developing and we had a producer involved who really liked it but he said 'I'd really like your father to do a pass on the script because it'd be much more sellable.' So I gave it to Dad – it took him a lot longer than usual because of illness but he did it and he finished it. George and I felt we needed to prove we can direct horror – we've directed lots of other things before – but we thought we'd go 'genre'. So I said 'Dad, we've got a tiny bit of money to do a short, but we really need an idea for a horror' and he said 'give me a minute' and I'm not joking, about a minute later he said 'okay, I've got it' and told me the idea. It's changed a little bit but ultimately, it's really exactly the same. The day before he passed away I was working on *The Still* and I was trying to work out how I could get a character to reappear without it feeling contrived and he solved it in about five seconds. So one of the last things he did was solving a problem on a script; I think it was only his body that was failing him, not his mind, he never lost that creative drive.

What, then, are your abiding memories of your dad, and his life and work?

Dad told a story about how, in the noughties, he went to ITV and he was talking about a particular show they were developing. They were talking about one character and Dad said 'oh, you mean a bit more like Cary Grant?' and the TV executive they were talking to looked dumbfounded, he had no idea who Cary Grant was, and Dad said 'If you

don't know who Cary Grant is, you've no business working in this industry'. Dad was a great believer in understanding what came before. He would always say 'never stop asking questions, never take the first answer, keep asking why until you get what you want and don't back down from the fight – if you believe in your idea you've got to fight for it.' He learnt that very early on. As a man he was generous – stupidly generous. Our house is like a trinkets museum. If someone liked something he'd just give it away; I remember he gave someone Steed's bowler hat and we had to step in to stop him giving any more away – we'd like to keep some memorabilia! He'd help anyone who had a script, he'd happily read it and he'd give them honest advice and

he had time for everyone all the time. He was very loud and very funny, but a great family man. *The Godfather* was one of his favourite movies; not because of the Mafia stuff, but because of the sense of family. People would come to our house and really feel like part of the family. His motto was 'if I've got it, you can have it' both professionally and personally. He was a really fun man to be around, you really knew when he came into a room. His passing has left a huge gap, which George and I will attempt to fill.

Brian Clemens passed away on January 10th, 2015, aged 83.

You can find out more about Sam and George's work and their father's legacy at clemensbros.co.uk.

BRIAN CLEMENS



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REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG
SCREEN GENRE
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: J. J. ABRAMS / SCREENPLAY: LAWRENCE KASDAN, J. J. ABRAMS, MICHAEL ARNDT / STARRING: DAISY RIDLEY, JOHN BOYEGA, HARRISON FORD, ADAM DRIVER, OSCAR ISAAC, CARRIE FISHER, MARK HAMILL, LUPITA NYONG'O, ANDY SERKIS, DOMHNALL GLEESON, PETER MAYHEW, ANTHONY DANIELS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

"A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...." these are a small assembly of words that mean a great deal to many people. Star Wars began as a wild dream in 1977, by George Lucas and a crew that veered from being frustrated to feeling tormented by what seemed to be, at points, a certain failure in the making. Then something special happened and in the following years, with Irvin Kershner's even greater sequel *The Empire Strikes Back* and Richard Marquand's story-closing *Return of the Jedi*, Star Wars became way more than a series of films, it became a phenomenon. Star Wars is a modern cinematic myth; for many it is a way of life and even in the controversial and turbulent times of the franchise (the prequels remain an avid source of debate), these films have influenced cinema unquestionably and impacted culture unshakably. So when Disney purchased Lucasfilm in 2012, after (for all intents and purposes) the final film *Revenge of the Sith* came out in 2005, and announced that the story would continue, it created a bigger bang than a thermal detonator in a Mustafar volcano. Star Wars

Episode VII: *The Force Awakens* is indeed an awakening.

Not content with attempting to continue a story concluded back in 1983, this sequel re-unites certain cast and crew members of the original trilogy and places them next to new faces. Director J. J. Abrams, fresh off a rough trek with *Star Trek Into Darkness* (which led to huge fan backlash), is the man tasked to try and ensure the survival of a saga in these changing times. But, "do or do not, there is no try", so the big question you all want to know is one we can actually answer without spoilers. Does J. J. manage it? Yes... yes he does. *The Force Awakens* is a shattering, exciting, engrossing and at times even tiring (in the best possible way) experience that marries the old and the new to create something that is really quite magical. The opening crawl and ever-masterful John Williams score accompanying it was met with applause at our screening and the beautiful final shot of the film and closing credits were likewise applauded. Believe us, this will be a universal occurrence.

The plot, well what we can tell you

of it, sees Luke Skywalker (Hamill) missing and ace resistance fighter pilot Poe Dameron (Isaac) hiding vital information to his whereabouts on his loyal droid companion BB-8 but when the dastardly First Order, led by Kylo Ren (Adam Driver), comes calling, BB-8 must flee. BB-8 soon meets a scavenger called Rey (Daisy Ridley) and Dameron meets First Order stormtrooper "Finn" (Boyega), who struggles with his dark duties and attempts to escape, fate naturally brings Rey, Finn and BB-8 together on an unexpected adventure in a fight against an ever-growing galactic darkness. OK, there are some details there, but we have kept it as condensed and vague as possible (honest) because *The Force Awakens* is a journey best left for you to discover yourself. It embraces the successes, the flaws and the beloved moments of all that came before to deliver a film some may well accuse of fan service or rehashing *A New Hope*, but which actually takes the familiar flourishes of the series and uses them to create a brand new, exciting direction for Star Wars.

Kasdan, Abrams and Arndt's screenplay

STARBURST

plays out simply but boasts a sense of joy, heart and brewing darkness in equal measure. The story has multiple tangents and twists and the central plotline is unexpected, emotional and ripe for advancement across what will be a new generation of Star Wars lore. The biggest draw of *The Force Awakens* may be its nostalgic implications and indeed the film constantly nods to and references what many viewers will see as the franchise's glory days. However, these classic tropes of the narrative serve a greater purpose in helping to establish an altogether new course for Star Wars. While not forgetting its past, Abrams' film looks to the future and leaves audiences eager to see potential arcs and characters introduced in this film develop later. The script, like the direction, retains the franchise's core elements of action, comedy and romanticism and adds an epic sense of progression in scale and themes. This is a refreshing film, one that continues the Star Wars binary opposition of good and bad, constantly in battle to balance out the Force, but which is boosted by a sense of innovation. From updated colloquialisms to the prominent female presence in the film, this is another case of sci-fi for leading the way in cinematic development and the overall film feels fresh and exciting as a result. In fact, the film often feels drawn from years of expanded universe developments and almost like it was made in conjunction with fans... which it kind of was.

The less said about the cast and characters the better, but needless to say seeing Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill, Peter Mayhew and Anthony Daniels back in the roles they made iconic is stirring and often heart-swelling for viewers brought up on a healthy dose of bun haircuts and Chewbacca impressions. They all have major roles in this story, but of the original

cast, it is, perhaps appropriately, Harrison Ford who most stands out. His Han Solo here is a changed man; his outlook has changed and with every passing year so has he. Ford excels in showcasing this brilliant development in the Solo character. Yet through it all, he remains the gun-slinging rogue that won our hearts back in that cantina in Mos Eisley. The nostalgia value may be undeniable, but *The Force Awakens* is far more than a reunion of old mates and the new leads are exceptional proof.

Ridley is likeable, well developed and a very strong role model as Rey and her chemistry with Boyega's Finn is immediate. Boyega too takes the opportunity to showcase a range of emotions and is a lead you can relate to. Though they are made to bring their best thanks to the impeccable creation that is droid BB-8, who looks superb in design and is a blissful scene stealer worthy of taking over from R2-D2 in the cute, character-filled and expressive droid department. The new cast all bring their passion to this project, be it the authoritative Domhnall Gleeson or the cool as ice Isaac; if anything there are too many characters to choose from who all have an important presence in the film. But the show stealer is Adam Driver's new big bad Kylo Ren, who is a mesmerising presence, played with seething rage and emotional turbulence by the ever-exceptional Driver. Ren pursues the darkness psychotically and obsessively to give the Star Wars franchise one of its most unstable and compelling villains (and that is saying something). Ren is the best bad guy of the year, in one of the best films of the year.

The Force Awakens also marks a welcome return to the days of practical effects and props and while there is an

integration with a great deal of CGI (which is reliably brilliant), the film has not overstuffing the digital side of things and this is to its benefit. The sets are intricate throwbacks to behold, whose hidden treasures will undoubtedly benefit from repeat viewings. However, when we speak of visual grace, it would be foolish not to mention Dan Mindel's cinematography, which is possibly the greatest of the franchise, with the set pieces proving big, explosive and exciting and the locations being picture perfect for them. The Skellig Michael-filmed closing moments of the movie in particular are a change of pace for Star Wars scenery and breathtakingly beautiful. Then you have Williams' scoring that once again strives to strike the perfect tone and succeeds, with the occasional cheeky use of an iconic Star Wars riff, inevitably making the hairs on your arms stand to attention - especially in the dark closing lightsaber-filled action set-piece.

From old joys to fresh twists, this is a unique blockbuster experience that celebrates the franchise whilst also expanding it. There are shocks, there are thrills and at times it takes a few moments to absorb what you have seen in this vast, enthusiastic and sometimes overwhelming experience. Fans of Star Wars are well served here (as are non-fans to be honest) and will likely get emotional themselves at Abrams' accomplishment. Bottom line, this is glorious, involving and top-notch entertainment. This is both the Star Wars you know and the Star Wars you don't but it is also the Star Wars you love. *The Force Awakens* is calling out to you, just let it in...

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★ 9

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★★★ 10



STARBURST



THE HATEFUL EIGHT

CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: QUENTIN TARANTINO / STARRING: SAMUEL L. JACKSON, KURT RUSSELL, JENNIFER JASON LEIGH, WALTON GOGGINS, JAMES PARKS, TIM ROTH, MICHAEL MADSEN, BRUCE DERN, DEMIÁN BICHIR, CHANNING TATUM / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The eighth film from Quentin Tarantino, *The Hateful Eight*, as with every QT effort these days, certainly has a lot to live up to. And rightly so, for this is a man who can lay claim to being one of the very best filmmakers of his generation. Of course, though, with great hype comes great responsibility, and the big question is whether this latest Western of Tarantino's has enough bullets to get the job done.

As *The Hateful Eight* opens, we're introduced to bounty hunter John Ruth (Kurt Russell) and his most recent bounty, Daisy Domergue (Jennifer Jason Leigh). Ruth's plan is to take his prisoner to the town of Red Rock and collect the \$10,000 prize placed on her head. Picking up passengers along the way in the form of fellow bounty hunter Major Marquis Warren (Samuel L. Jackson) and Sheriff Chris Mannix (Walton Goggins), it's not long before the snowy conditions of Wyoming cause our crew to hole up in a stagecoach stopover for a few days. Along with Ruth's driver O.B. (James Parks), this ragtag crew then find themselves in the company of a group of strangers (Tim Roth, Michael Madsen, Bruce Dern, Demián Bichir) as all may not be quite as peaceful and serene as it appears.

The basic plot of *The Hateful Eight* really doesn't do it justice, but it's really impossible to elaborate on any further details for fear of spoilers. Safe to say, Tarantino has brought tension and atmosphere by the bucketload as a tale of twists and turns unravels before our eyes. Channeling many of the aspects

that made Westerns such must-see movies decades prior, QT, as ever, pays homage whilst putting his own unique spin on things. The colours, saturation and intensity of an old classic are all present, whilst the snappy Tarantino dialogue and gruesome-when-needed violence make this a very adult Western.

Assisted by a fantastic Ennio Morricone score, the film's cast all add to the drama and enjoyment as they take turns in being the centre of the movie's attention. Jackson puts in his best performance in many a year, Jennifer Jason Leigh is fantastic when given the chance to be more than Kurt Russell's punch bag, Walton Goggins steals the show at times, and every cast member, be they minor or major, bring genuine

quality to this latest QT effort.

To any and all fans of Tarantino's work, *The Hateful Eight* will be a wonderful slow-burn experience that showcases a true master of his craft. For those who aren't fully on board the Quentin bandwagon, though, this film could prove a little drawn out and overindulgent. Luckily for us, we're firmly in the former, and as such *The Hateful Eight* is a stunning piece of cinema that gets 2016 off with a bang.

ANDREW POLLARD

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★ 8

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★★★ 9



STARBURST



CREED

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: RYAN COOGLER / SCREENPLAY: RYAN COOGLER, AARON COVINGTON / STARRING: MICHAEL B. JORDAN, SYLVESTER STALLONE, TESSA THOMPSON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Creed is technically the latest instalment in the beloved Rocky franchise, even if Sylvester Stallone's famed Balboa isn't the main focal point of Ryan Coogler's film. Taking centre-stage here is Michael B. Jordan's Adonis Johnson, the son of the late, great Apollo Creed. Having never known his father, Adonis is on a mission to follow in the footsteps of the legendary Apollo, the man who was the bestest of buds with Rocky Balboa and who died in the ring

during Rocky IV. As such, the young fighter turns to the best friend of his deceased dad as he looks to pave his own career in the fight game.

What we're given here is a film best described as an emotional rollercoaster. Is it cheesy? Hell yes, but that's to be expected, and Creed manages to be utterly fantastic at the same time. When we first see Adonis, he's in some sort of juvenile lock-up and communicating with his fists,

and then we get introduced to the young adult version of the character. Desperate to forge his own legacy, yet clearly struggling with the burden of his father's presence as a fighter and dealing with having never known his old man, Adonis is a character of great depth and complexity, played out perfectly by Jordan as he ends up on a collision course with the undefeated 'Pretty' Ricky Conlan (British boxer Tony Bellew).

Despite being very much a Rocky film in feel, this is definitely Michael B. Jordan's picture. The actor who made his name in the indie hit Chronicle shows here that he has all the makings of a Hollywood leading man when given the right material to work with. Jordan brings huge emotional weight, anger, uncertainty, torment and regret to Adonis and makes him a character that you can firmly get behind for this film and in the future (there's supposedly at least one further Creed-centric movie being planned). Still though, Stallone's Rocky is with Adonis for the journey, and it's fantastic to see the return of a fan favourite of film history. Here

we see Rocky battling his own problems whilst doing whatever he can to give back to the son of his fallen friend, and Sly's turn as Balboa makes you remember just why this is one of the most beloved characters in cinema history and pop culture.

Creed is a fresh start for a franchise that has had several knock downs over the years, and Ryan Coogler has managed to beautifully balance a new spin on an old favourite whilst paying enough homage and respect to what's gone before (even elaborating on Rocky and Apollo's famed 'third fight'). The film powers through a whole range of emotion, never relenting for its two-hour-plus runtime, and what could have been a played-out, by-the-numbers dud is an engaging, considerate and hugely enjoyable ride of a movie that will have audiences taking the hits and riding the highs of its principal cast as they embark on this latest chapter of the Rocky saga.

ANDREW POLLARD

EXPECTED ++++++ 7

ACTUAL ++++++ 8



THE REVENANT

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: ALEJANDRO G. IÑÁRRITU / SCREENPLAY: ALEJANDRO G. IÑÁRRITU, MARK L. SMITH / STARRING: LEONARDO DICAPRIO, TOM HARDY, DOMHNALL GLEESON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Birdman's Alejandro G. Iñárritu's latest effort, The Revenant, is a survival-cum-revenge movie based upon the real-life antics of Hugh Glass (and also based on Michael Punke's The Revenant: A Novel of Revenge). Set in 1823 Louisiana, Glass (Leonardo DiCaprio) is ravaged by a bear and left for dead by his men. Focusing on his will to survive and his determination to hunt down a particular cohort who has wronged him, what unravels is a gloomy, downbeat tale of struggle, iron will and

raw brutality.

To elaborate a little further on the plot, DiCaprio's Glass, along with son Hawk (Forrest Goodluck), is part of a hunting group led by Captain Henry (Domhnall Gleeson). When Glass is ravaged by the aforementioned grizzly – itself one of the most stomach-turning scenes attached to mainstream cinema in the last few years – Henry has to make a painstaking decision whether to leave one of his best men for dead or to continue with him as

part of his crew, which would slow down their snowy journey immeasurably and put the rest of his men in danger. It's then that Henry tasks Fitzgerald (Tom Hardy) and Bridger (Will Poulter) with staying at the side of Glass until he takes his seemingly inevitable final breath. The problem here, however, is that Fitzgerald is a self-serving sort with his eyes firmly on what is best for him.

The Revenant is a film that will firmly divide opinion; to many it will be a genuine masterpiece of modern cinema; to others it will be an overly-long, convoluted-yet-bland effort that never really knows what it's trying to become. Regardless of whether you find enjoyment in the film or not, there is simply no disputing that Iñárritu and his team have crafted a tale that is phenomenal to the eye; the crisp, snowy setting radiates the movie throughout, whilst the cinematography also manages to perfectly capture the bleak reality and grey skies that serve as a frame to this desperate story of one man's determination for revenge.

There's no doubting that DiCaprio throws himself wholeheartedly into the role of Hugh Glass, but his muffled, often

muted performance falls foul of a screenplay that at times feels far too bland to keep the attention of some. Clocking in at over two and half hours, The Revenant is certainly a lengthy watch, but the heart of the story itself may struggle to keep many viewers involved. Adding to the issues of the movie is the fact that it struggles to balance itself between being an art house effort, a survival story, and a revenge thriller, never quite pulling off the necessities required to be much of either; instead it leaves the viewer with a mish mash of a narrative that soon gets old.

The real star here is Tom Hardy, who does wonders (and is literally unrecognizable) as the no-good Fitzgerald, but his time on screen is sadly shorter than we'd have liked. When all is said and done, though, The Revenant is a matter of taste. For this writer, the film just dropped off into the realm of blandness far too often, but that's not to say that others won't gush plentiful over Iñárritu's latest movie.

ANDREW POLLARD

EXPECTED ++++++ 8

ACTUAL ++++++ 6



IN THE HEART OF THE SEA

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: RON HOWARD / SCREENPLAY: CHARLES LEAVITT / STARRING: CHRIS HEMSWORTH, BENJAMIN WALKER, CILLIAN MURPHY, TOM HOLLAND, BEN WHISHAW, BRENDAN GLEESON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

To put it in its simplest terms, *In the Heart of the Sea* is basically the story of the real-life tale that inspired Herman Melville's legendary *Moby Dick*. As Melville (Ben Whishaw) sits down with the last remaining survivor of New England's doomed Essex vessel, we get to hear how one whaling ship's mission was decimated by a ginormous white whale.

Almost mirroring elements of *Titanic* in how we find a classic yarn revisited through

flashbacks and memoirs, Ron Howard's movie is certainly an intriguing one. As our way in to the story, we see Melville trying to extract the finer details of the Essex's demise from its last remaining survivor, Tom Nickerson (Brendan Gleeson). It's then that we're then taken back to 1820 and an Essex that sets sail on a mission to bring back a gargantuan amount of whale oil, essentially the fuel of its day. With a young Nickerson (Tom Holland) as part of the

crew, the Captain of the vessel is George Pollard (Benjamin Walker), a man with very little prior experience but who is well revered in the shipping industry purely down to his surname (well, in fairness, it is a pretty cool name). Whilst the crew cannot take to Pollard and his decisions are not always the wisest ones, First Mate Owen Chase (Chris Hemsworth) is a man of the people, an experienced sea dog who knows the ocean and who has the respect of many. The problem for Chase is, however, he doesn't have the right surname in an industry that's all about heritage. With the Essex struggling, the decision's made to veer out to a location that apparently houses hundreds of whales but which also carries the almost mythical threat of a 100-foot white whale with slight anger issues.

Howard's film is predictable, yet that's not to say it's not enjoyable. If you can get past Hemsworth's mish mash of an accent (part New England local, part booming Thunder God), there are plenty of impressive

turns to be seen. Supporting performances from Holland, Whishaw, Gleeson, and Cillian Murphy (as Chase's long-standing partner-in-crime) are all pitch-perfect, but the focus of the tale is really on Hemsworth's Chase and Walker's Pollard. Walker is fantastic as the inexperienced toff who is determined to stamp his authority on the voyage, whilst Hemsworth is nothing more than fine in his role. It feels for a few years we've been waiting for Hemsworth to finally step up as a leading Hollywood man, but *In the Heart of the Sea* sees him do well enough without really standing out.

As a spectacle, the film is stunning at times, with the visuals spectacular, but the story itself is the problem here; a predictable, one-note narrative that ultimately never really manages to truly capture your attention.

ANDREW POLLARD

EXPECTED ++++++ 7

ACTUAL ++++++ 6



SNOOPY AND CHARLIE BROWN: THE PEANUTS MOVIE

CERT: U / DIRECTOR: STEVE MARTINO / SCREENPLAY: BRYAN SCHULZ, CRAIG SCHULZ, CORNELIUS ULIANO / STARRING: NOAH SCHNAPP, BILL MELENDEZ, ALEX GARFIN, ANASTASIA BREDIKHINA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Perhaps best known for *Scrat*, that poor little bastard of a squirrel who pops up in the *Ice Age* franchise and in several shorts before their other movies, Blue Sky Studios have now commandeered Snoopy and the hopelessly unlucky Charlie Brown for a *Peanuts* reboot. It's becoming increasingly clear that the Blue Sky bunch are absolute sadists, obsessed with watching *Scrat* squirm through terrible ordeals and now keen to watch poor old Charlie Brown completely fail at life's everyday obstacles.

Based on Charles M. Schulz's much beloved scribbled cartoon strips, Blue Sky have

updated the animation, giving Charlie and pals a shiny 3D digital makeover, but little else has changed. Not messing too much with the formula or characters that made *Peanuts* famous, Blue Sky have played it very safe and pretty damn smart keeping most of the charm of Schulz's original work.

Charlie is surrounded by old familiar friends; benevolent Linus with his trusty blanket, Beethoven-idolising pianist Schroeder, sporty ginger Peppermint Patty, and dust-cloud covered Pigpen. When a new little red-haired girl moves into the neighbourhood, Charlie's attempts to impress

her go predictably pear-shaped or seemingly unnoticed. While he musters up the courage to actually talk to the object of his affections, his trusty canine pal Snoopy goes in search of adventures in his own imagination, hunting down a poodle named Fifi who is being menaced by Snoopy's nemesis the Red Baron.

It's an incredibly slight story with absolutely nothing of any consequence at stake. That might make it admirably true to the comics, but it also leaves the movie feeling incredibly episodic, disjointed even, as it lurches from one sequence to another. The story bumbles along like Charlie Brown, but with none of the character's determination. He might want to talk to this new girl in town, but it's not a goal that all viewers will be able to get behind, particularly the younger ones in the audience who probably just want to see more of Snoopy flying his kennel into barmy battles with the Red Baron.

Peanuts ends up feeling like two separate films, one in Snoopy's mind and one in Charlie's real world, neither of which gel particularly well with the other. Both are full of imaginative visual gags and plenty of slapstick to make kids giggle, but overall the first

half of the film drags with little sense of purpose or direction. It eventually feels as though it's getting somewhere, but it's impossible to shake the idea that Blue Sky should have brought Charlie, Snoopy and the always entertaining scene-stealer Woodstock back for television. As a series of episodes, Blue Sky has done a fantastic job at keeping the spirit of Schulz alive, but it fails to work nearly as well at feature length.

Everything about the *Peanuts* movie feels reverential and traditional; from the boy-meets-girl story, to the one token black kid character, to Charlie's bossy stereotype friend/bully Lucy. Even the 3D digital animation doesn't diverge from Schulz's original drawings much. It's clearly a labour of love, but in stretching Charlie and Snoopy's story to nearly 90 minutes, *Peanuts* becomes laboured itself. By all means let Blue Sky keep making *Peanuts* adventures, but put them on TV where they'll find a snugger fit in future. Like with the mini-adventures of *Scrat*, a little Snoopy goes a long way.

PETE TURNER

EXPECTED ++++++ 5

ACTUAL ++++++ 6



GOOSEBUMPS

CERT: PG / **DIRECTOR:** ROB LETTERMAN / **SCREENPLAY:** DARREN LEMKE / **STARRING:** JACK BLACK, DYLAN MINNETTE, ODEYA RUSH, RYAN LEE / **RELEASE DATE:** FEBRUARY 5TH

Jack Black stars in a horror comedy for kids, based on not one particular Goosebumps book, but countless stories written by the inexhaustible author R. L. Stine.

When teen Zach (Minnette) moves to Delaware following the death of his father, he arrives to find he is living next door to a mysterious and moody neighbour (Black). While settling into a new school is hard enough (especially when his mum is the new Vice Principal), Zach becomes suspicious of his neighbour, who is very keen to keep his daughter Hannah (Rush) from speaking to Zach. Turns out the mystery man next door is actually reclusive Goosebumps author R. L. Stine, and all hell breaks loose when the many monsters of his imagination are released from the pages of his manuscripts into the real world. Zach, Hannah, Stine and Zach's new tagalong friend Champ must stop the creatures, including murderous garden gnomes and a giant praying mantis, before they destroy the entire town.

Goosebumps starts very well, with a slight feel of *The Bubs* about it, but then descends more into a *Jumanji*-style throw-everything-on-the-screen-and-see-what-sticks kind of way. The ace up its sleeve is that Goosebumps is really quite funny, and often not because of Black. While he's busy doing what seems to be an ill-conceived Tyrion Lannister impression, other members of the cast are running away with the movie. Dylan Minnette is excellent as

dashing teen hero Zach, but both Jillian Bell and Amy Ryan are sadly underused as Zach's goofy mum and kooky aunt. Still, Ryan Lee is great value as Zach's geeky best friend Champ, providing much of the comedy in amidst the family-friendly horror.

If you haven't read any of the Goosebumps books or seen any of the series, there's probably a whole load of vaguely interesting backstory to some of these freakish creations that might have helped here. Stine has clearly been prolific, but many of his characters are reduced to little more than cameos in this action-packed and overstuffed movie. No wonder Black's version of Stine comes off as grumpy; there might not be much left to cram into many more money-spinning sequels!

In the Goosebumps movie, it seems like Letterman and Lemke have just ripped off a whole load of classic monsters and made them slightly more kid-friendly. The Triffids, Chucky and Stephen King's Christine are perhaps the most obvious homages/rip-offs, but there's plenty more where that came from. Psychotic ventriloquist dummy Slappy should be the terrifying star of the show, but despite being the mastermind of the chaos, he isn't given enough screen time to really scare the kids into wetting themselves.

It all heads towards an OTT CGI-splattered climax where the comedy takes a back seat to adventure and

mayhem. There's an obvious twist that even an illiterate child might see coming, but it just about works and makes for a briefly emotional payoff.

Goosebumps is no *Gremlins*, but for some of the running time, it does have a bit of a classic '80s feel about it. A sequel certainly wouldn't be the end of the world.

PETE TURNER

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★ 6

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★ 6



REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME
VIDEO RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



NEKROMANTIK 2

DUAL / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: JÖRG BUTTGEREIT / SCREENPLAY: JÖRG BUTTGEREIT, FRANZ RODENKIRCHEN / STARRING: MONIKA M, MARK REEDER, CAROLA EWERS, ASTRID EWERS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Porn of the dead, take two. As if he hadn't repulsed audiences enough in 1987 with his infamous *Nekromantik*, filth merchant Jörg Buttgereit returns with a second bout of kinky cavorting with cadavers. Specifically Robert, last seen stabbing himself to death as the previous film ended. This sequel picks up where he left off, with Robert dead and buried. Enter lover Monika, who reclaims his corpse and brings it home for her own perverse pleasures.

There's domestic bliss for a while, until Rob starts to kick up a stink and Monika meets the decidedly alive Mark (Reeder) in a surprising meet-cute, and the pair begin tentatively dating. Scenes of Monika and Rob's stinky corpse sex are interspersed with more traditional rom-com imagery, such as the pair eating ice creams, riding a Ferris wheel and Mark finding a disembodied decomposing dick in her refrigerator. Well, it wouldn't be a decent romantic comedy without some sort of big undisclosed secret in the way, would it?

There's a surprising amount of story at play, compared to the first film's relatively basic body horror porn. Like the step up in quality from *Evil Dead* to *Evil Dead 2* or *Night to Dawn of the Dead*, this is a confident, more ambitious take on the

first film – still experimental, but slicker and more 'traditional' - as traditional as a film about gross cadaver copulation can ever get, anyway. Curiously, the added technical sheen makes *Nekromantik II*

feel less exciting than its predecessor, the artifice more visible. That gets you a gorgeous soundtrack, hypnotic fantasy sequences and a bit of bizarro with a pair of nudists eating boiled eggs on a rooftop, but there's nothing to compare to the feeling of discovering *Nekromantik* for the first time.

Still, Buttgereit has lost none of his ability to repulse, with there being something to offend pretty much all audiences. While the sex seems (mildly) toned down, the special effects are horribly effective, and a drawn-out bit containing real animal cruelty will have many a hardened carnivore considering vegetarianism a viable lifestyle choice for years to come.

All of this, accompanied by a catalogue of documentaries, special features and interviews, wrapped up with the care and attention we've come to expect from Arrow by now. Disgusting, horrifying, mesmerising and awful, *Nekromantik II* is the most beautiful terrible thing you will ever see.

Extras: Polaroid Postcards / Limited Edition Book / Soundtrack CD / Image Gallery / Audio Commentary / Trailers / Short Films / Introduction / Outtakes / Concert Footage / Music Videos / Making Of

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★★★★★ 9



STARBURST



THE LAST OF ROBIN HOOD

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: RICHARD GRATZER, WASH WESTMORELAND / STARRING: KEVIN KLINE, DAKOTA FANNING, SUSAN SARANDON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

By the mid-to-late 1950s, both the career and reputation of legendary Hollywood heart-throb/swordsman (in every sense of the word) Errol Flynn were on the skids. His star, which shone most brightly in the iconic *The Adventures of Robin Hood* in 1938, had long since waned and, as he stumbled through middle age, he became a pitiable figure reluctant to accept that his glory days were long behind him. He died in the arms of a much younger woman – star-struck dancer Beverly Aadland – and *The Last of Robin Hood* begins in the frenzied aftermath of the star's death and then rewinds – courtesy of his mother Florence telling the 'real story' of her

daughter's shocking romance to a plausible journalist – to chronicle the larger-than-life star's last couple of years.

In many ways, *The Last of Robin Hood* is the story of a different time and much of what's depicted here appears both unsavoury and unpalatable to modern sensibilities. Beverly's pushy mother Florence (Susan Sarandon) turns a blind eye to her daughter's 'friendship' with Flynn (Kevin Kline), who has promised to give her a helping hand up the showbiz ladder. But Flynn and Beverly have become more than friends; in one unsettling scene, Flynn 'seduces' Beverly (only fifteen years old at the time), but what's

depicted is quite clearly rape and there's the sense that Beverly knows it, even though she keeps it to herself and ultimately allows the penitent Flynn to wheedle his way back into her affections. Florence, meanwhile, initially scandalised by her daughter's relationship with a man over three times her age, eventually learns to turn a blind eye when she realises what Beverly's association with Flynn, still a charming smooth-talker, could mean for her and her daughter.

The *Last of Robin Hood* develops beyond its unsettling, queasy opening into a genuine love story between Flynn and his "Woody" (the nickname he gives Beverly as she reminds him of a 'wood nymph'), and the two eventually become virtually inseparable. But somehow, despite their clear devotion to one another, we can never really shake off the slightly distasteful nature of the relationship and the fact that it began in a shocking act of violation and that Beverly's mother quickly became complicit in Flynn's lascivious behaviour. Yet it's clear that Flynn and Beverly became the real deal and they stayed together even when the relationship became public knowledge and a genuine Hollywood scandal. The story of Flynn's failure to restore his professional reputation and his sad death in 1959, addicted to pain-killers and obsessed with

booze, is in itself, beyond his notorious inability to 'keep it in his pants', a salutary lesson in Hollywood excess.

The film, clearly a low budget effort despite the presence of its accomplished cast, has a determinedly TV movie air about it, and whilst it makes no moral judgements about Flynn or the Aadlands – this is the story, warts and all – it's lifted out of the mundane by strong turns by the ever-reliable Sarandon and Dakota Fanning as the naive, starry-eyed Beverly. Kline's Flynn is a little one-note, playing up to the gauche stereotype with little in the way of nuance or subtlety, yet he passes muster if only because of his remarkable physical resemblance to the fallen idol.

The Last of Robin Hood is a mercifully largely unsalacious retelling of the fall of one of Hollywood's most famous sons and it's a story told with sensitivity and intelligence and, refreshingly in an age of outrage and offence, with no desire to pass judgement or wave a moralising cinematic finger. But you'll still feel a little uneasy at the true story you've been told and feel relieved that things like this just don't happen anymore. *Do they?*

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★ 7



THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.

BD + DVD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: GUY RITCHIE / SCREENPLAY: GUY RITCHIE, LIONEL WIGRAM / STARRING: HENRY CAVILL, ARMIE HAMMER, ALICIA VIKANDER, ELIZABETH DEBICKI, HUGH GRANT / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When the Cold War was still very much a 'thing', there was a television series called *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* which focused on an American spy and a KGB agent teaming up to save the world on a daily basis, even if they didn't really get along. Imagine a buddy cop story with less of the buddy part. Fast forward to now and we

have a new Hollywood remake. We know, another remake, but, guess what? This one is actually pretty good.

Directed by Guy Ritchie who, let's not forget, brought us the entertaining Robert Downey Jr.-starring Sherlock Holmes movies and has pedigree in entertaining action films, and starring Superman and *The Lone Ranger*

(although let's forget about that, shall we?), this remake seemed doomed to failure.

Given a five minute trailer at the cinema, which came across as desperate and needy, with that running time, we should have already seen all the best bits and more, and up against Bond it never should have stood a chance. However, Ritchie has given us a rich slice of entertainment.

Set during the period when Germany was still split by the Berlin Wall, Napoleon Solo (Henry Cavill) and Illya Kuryakin (Armie Hammer) have to team up to track down a nuclear weapon before it's detonated. That's the basic plot and, probably due to its simplicity, the film chugs along at a merry pace. Solo is a thief who is only fulfilling the spy role to keep out of prison and has a dry wit with a wardrobe of pithy comments to choose from; Illya has anger management issues and threatens to explode at any

time, jeopardising the mission.

Of course, they manage to just about put their differences to one side to complete the mission, and there are a few double crosses here and there as the picture starts to clear during their adventures.

The ending may seem a little bit like an episode of *Top Gear* at times, but the fact is that the director has not made the mistake of trying to match Bond. Instead, the film has its tongue inserted firmly inside its cheek. A serious, by-the-numbers '60s spy thriller would have been droll and not at all what was needed here. There are a couple of timescale inconsistencies, but nothing that is too jarring.

Setting itself up for a sequel, this is one U.N.C.L.E. we'd be happy to see again, and not just for Christmas.

JD GILLAM

★★★★★★★ 8



THE RIDICULOUS 6

VOD (NETFLIX) / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: FRANK CORACI / SCREENPLAY: TIM HERLIHY, ADAM SANDLER / STARRING: ADAM SANDLER, TAYLOR LAUTNER, JORGE GARCIA, TERRY CREWS, ROB SCHNEIDER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Whatever Quentin Tarantino's snow-bound bastards get up to in his forthcoming opus, it's doubtful that any of them will be as truly hateful as Adam Sandler at his Adam Sandler'est. The Ridiculous 6 is a collaboration between Sandler's Happy Madison filmmaking studio and Netflix, of Jessica Jones, Daredevil, W/Bob

and David, Orange is the New Black and brand new Arrested Development acclaim. To no-one's surprise, The Ridiculous 6 will not be remembered as one of Netflix's successes.

It should do a good job of capturing the Adam Sandler audience though, being absolutely everything one has come to expect from a modern

Sandler movie. Case in point, Sandler as a surprisingly competent gun (or knife) slinger (like his turn in *You Don't Mess With the Zohan*, except less surprisingly great) and Rob Schneider as his Mexican half-brother. Steve Buscemi cameos as a dweeb town dentist, and there's a mule that exists only to fart and shit everywhere. We're only one Kevin James away from a full house in Sandler bingo.

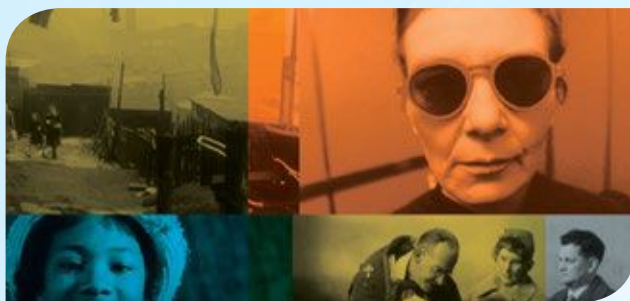
Of the performers, we're in two camps: the terrible and the wasted. While one can probably guess up the former (give or take an atrocious Taylor Lautner and surprisingly rubbish Jorge Garcia), the latter makes for truly depressing reading. Buscemi is just one name in a list, which consists of Luke Wilson, Will Forte, Steve Zahn, Harvey Keitel, Nick Nolte, Danny Trejo and, most unforgivably of all, Terry Crews (who at least gets all the best laughs, and wardrobe). As

wasted potential goes, it's up there with *Movie 43*.

Seth MacFarlane can breathe a sigh of relief – *One Million Ways to Die in the West* is no longer the worst comedy Western ever made (we're not counting *Wild Wild West*). There's sharting asses, Adam Sandler doing a stupid voice, numerous racist stereotypes, and Taylor Lautner doing an even worse voice. And yet it's the best thing Sandler has done in years. Given the cast assembled and sheer amount of jokes being cracked, it's impossible not to smile (and even laugh!) at least a couple of times, as bad as you might feel afterwards. They'll grow on you, this *Ridiculous 6*, much as you might hate them for it.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★★★★★ 5



VISIONS OF CHANGE: THE EVOLUTION OF THE BRITISH TV DOCUMENTARY VOLUME 1: BBC 1951-1967
DVD / CERT: E / DIRECTORS: VARIOUS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

This double DVD set, selected by the British Film Institute (BFI), chronicles the many changes going on in the drab post-war years. These changes were occurring in British society and in the way the BBC itself produced television documentaries.

After the war, the BBC had wanted to broadcast newsreels that were being produced for the cinema, but when the newsreel companies refused to give them permission, a separate film unit was organised to provide a regular BBC Television Newsreel series. These were filmed in 35mm format and the unit soon became the basis for its documentary productions.

One outstanding early BBC documentary, included in this set, is John Read's 1951 look at the work of sculptor Henry Moore. It focuses on him working on his *Reclining Figure*

for the Festival of Britain, and the processes he used to create this work of art. The commentary, written by Read and spoken by actor Bernard Miles, is a rather schoolmasterly explanation of how Moore's work takes an abstract look at the human figure and integrates these forms with the landscape and with the nature of the materials he uses. Music composed by William Alwyn elegantly accompanies the many views of Moore's sculptures both in the studio and in the presence of nature where they belong. The sculptures are rotated and seen from different angles to show off the play of light and shade on their smooth curvaceous surfaces, underlining their form and beauty. There is even a segment where Moore addresses the camera, and it's great to see a brief glimpse of him at the end looking like he can't get away from this fate

worse than death!

Whereas Henry Moore is a traditional form of documentary shot on 35mm film, the *Test Flight* programme broadcast in the *Eye on Research* series in 1959 uses new techniques that bring the immediacy of television images to the audience. Using outside-broadcast cameras over six series, from 1957 to 1961, they visited research establishments and laboratories to provide live coverage of the latest advances in science. *Test Flight*, edited by Aubrey E. Singer, is a prime example of these programmes. Presented by Raymond Baxter, he interviews test pilot Squadron Leader S J Hubbard before he sets off to create a sonic boom. It provides the story of this test flight as it happens, using interviews with scientists and pre-filmed sequences to show the effects of a sonic boom when the aircraft passes the speed of sound. Looking at it now, it looks like a supreme work of logistics and organisation.

In contrast to the sobriety of the science and factual programming, there was room for more experimental filmmaking using mobile and versatile 16mm cameras to catch glimpses of modern Britain. A good example of this is Ken Russell's *Pop Goes the Easel*, imaginatively looks at the fantasies of four young artists, and is itself a work of pop art using a combination of hand-

held cameras and rapid editing.

John Schlesinger, who like Russell, also went on to direct feature films, produced *Song of the Valley* in 1957, a 3 minute-long mix of fact and fiction in the streets of Halifax. Two years later, *Morning in the Streets* takes an impressionistic look at life in the backstreets of a Northern City. Using a more autobiographical format Dennis Potter in 1960 viewed the changing lives of people in *Between Two Rivers*. He visits the Forest of Dean where he grew up, and shows how changes in traditional work and life are affecting individual lives and communities. In 1964's *The Colony*, Philip Donnellan explored the lives of Caribbean people in Birmingham, examining and explaining the traditional view of Britain and Empire. The set is rounded off by *Dispute: Round 1* and *Dispute: Round 2*, which use the fly-on-the-wall format to observe the two sides of an industrial battle between the workers and the management of a haulage company.

These wonderful, grainy, monochrome TV programmes from the 1950s and 1960s are like transmissions from another planet and make you appreciate the versatility and imaginative output of the BBC in those eventful years.

NIGEL WATSON

★★★★★★★★★ 9



JEKYLL AND HYDE: SEASON 1

DVD / CERT: 12 / SHOWRUNNER: CHARLIE HIGSON / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: TOM BATEMAN, RICHARD E. GRANT, NATALIE GUMEDE, DONALD SUMPTER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The latest horror classic to be revitalised for the 21st century, *Jekyll and Hyde* is set during 1930s London where Robert Jekyll, having moved from Ceylon, is trying to uncover the secrets from his past. However, he's inherited the curse of his grandfather in which, when angered or in danger, he undertakes a twisted transformation into the powerful, yet unhinged Hyde. As Jekyll tries to find the answers and searches for a cure for his condition, he is continuously drawn deep down into Hyde's world of monstrous creatures and freaks of nature. This show is basically a reimagining of Robert Louis Stevenson's classic novel,

having a Hammer Horror-style theme and tone about it, as well as bearing a similar style and flair to Guy Ritchie's Sherlock Holmes movies.

On the one hand, it appears to be aiming for a family audience in the manner of Doctor Who, yet it's a show that falls awkwardly between two stools: too creepy and intense for younger viewers who'd love its sense of adventure, too pantomimey for older viewers more interested in full-blooded horror. In the end, it can become occasionally messy as a result, and yet it's much more enjoyable than one can possibly imagine. It's true that its relation to the literary novel is probably passing at

very best, but it has a unique design quality about it, having a gothic aesthetic that entirely befits the story, right down to the fog-bound streets of 1930s London. Of course, the story of Jekyll and Hyde is on that cusp of thriller and horror, almost in the same way that giallo films were made when they started out. As the series goes on, we see more monsters and demons making an appearance, which is trying to relate to the Doctor Who or Hammer Horror aspect of its target audience, and the creatures are creative, if at times unoriginal.

Newcomer Tom Bateman is completely engaging in his dual role as Jekyll and Hyde; in both parts, he manages to display his full acting range, going from compassionate to maniacal continuously. If anything, it is a pure showcase of Bateman's acting talents, even if his performance as Hyde somewhat camp. In fact, nearly all the actors' performances are somewhat campy (we're talking row of pink tents level of camp here), but if anything, this works well with the overall charm of the series. Each actor brings something new and unexpected to the show, thanks to the likes of Natalie Gumele, Donald Sumpter, and Christian McKay. The real standout, unsurprisingly, has to be Richard E. Grant, who brings real deadpan quality to

the role of the head of Military Intelligence Other (MIO) – tasked with keeping monsters under control and under wraps – as well as managing to being wonderfully louche, magnetic and sparky in both his delivery and mannerisms. Other standouts include Natasha O'Keefe taking wing as a wickedly arch (and drop-dead sexy) femme fatale, and Wallis Day, who becomes an important part in the final three episodes, giving an incredibly gutsy performance that sees her as a rising talent to watch out for.

In the end, *Jekyll and Hyde* is a consistently entertaining romp, which does indeed struggle to find its tone. It is tonally all over the place, and as a result of that, it struggles to find its target audience. There are strong positives to it with its selection of charming performances, the show's rich sense of style and flair and the action/adventure sequences being indeed action-packed. *Jekyll and Hyde* is interesting and fun up to a point, and if showrunner Charlie Higson manages to iron out the creaks and bumps in the road, then this show might have legs. Sure it's flawed film, but it's still fun nonetheless.

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★★★★★ 7



VACATION

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JONATHAN GOLDSTEIN, JOHN FRANCIS DALEY / STARRING: ED HELMS, CHRISTINA APPLEGATE, SKYLAR GISONDO, STEELE STEBBINS, LESLIE MANN, CHRIS HEMSWORTH / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

"We're not redoing anything. This'll be completely different." 21 Jump Street has a lot to answer for – not least the cringe-worthy dad humor of Rusty Griswold, attempting to steal one of their best jokes. Yes, it's the further adventures of Rusty, of perma-

horny European Vacation and blank slate Christmas fame. Jason Lively and Johnny Galecki no more, Ed Helms is the next generation of Griswold patriarch. And, surprise, they're going on vacation! Again.

Thankfully, once they get

the awful meta humour out of the way (including the big cameo from Chevy Chase and Beverly D'Angelo, which doesn't really work), it's back to Walley World. Wife (Christina Applegate) and kids (one horrible, one less so) in tow, Russ attempts the very same road trip, stopping off to see a few relatives along the way. Like the old National Lampoon movies, *Vacation* is not so much a sustained narrative as a series of barely related skits in which the Griswolds manage to get themselves in and out of farcical scrapes. Russ may have gotten goofier with age (he's the typical Ed Helms character) but he's no less boner-prone – much of the film's pathos, and some of its comedy, revolves around his attempts to reconnect with his wife and get a little nookie in the most inopportune of places.

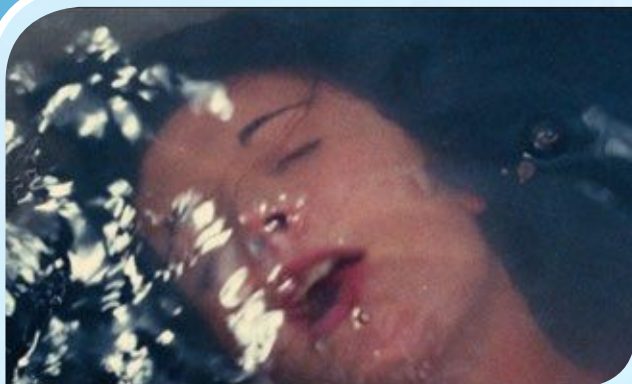
It's an old-fashioned family comedy combined

with the puerile, often mean humour of a *Hangover* sequel. The former gets us a near fatal rafting session, the latter scenes in which the Griswolds bathe in human turds and drive around with a human penis drawn on the side of their car – a car that serves as the movie's best running gag, by the way. Between that, its cameos (Hemsworth steals the show), and the bullying of Russ's older son by his little brother, *Vacation* is a lot funnier than it has any right to be. It fizzles out towards the end, and *We're the Millers* did it better, but this one holds some solid laughs nevertheless.

Exceeding expectations by not being a complete piece of ass, *Vacation* does a sterling job of not embarrassing the family name. Nice one, Russ.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★★★★★ 6



WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO SOLANGE?

DUAL / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: MASSIMO DALLAMANO / SCREENPLAY: BRUNO DI GERONIMO, MASSIMO DALLAMANO / STARRING: FABIO TESTI, CRISTINA GALBÓ, KARIN BAAL, CAMILLE KEATON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Possibly the best-known giallo that wasn't made by either Dario Argento or Mario Bava, *What Have You Done to Solange?* is a deceptively simple but gruesome little horror story that delivers its shocks with the precision of a Swiss watch and culminates in what is still – more than forty years after its release – a much-copied but never bettered gut punch of a resolution.

The set-up is simple. We're in 1970s London, a schoolgirl has been viciously murdered. The way she was murdered is especially nasty – stabbed

through her genitals, with the blade of the knife still protruding between her legs. Soon, other students at the girl's boarding school fall victim to the same murderer, and are slain in exactly the same way. When the murder took place, one of the girl's classmates thought she saw it happen. But she can't tell the police about it. Why? Because she wasn't alone; she is having an affair with her Italian teacher Enrico Rosseni (Fabio Testi), and to confess what she's seen will destroy his career and ruin his already badly strained marriage.

The problem is, Rosseni puts himself in the frame when he is noticed hanging around the crime scene. The only way to prove his innocence is to find the killer himself. And what is the significance of the green pins worn by each of the victims?

To give more of the story away would be to spoil the surprise. *What Have You Done to Solange?* is all about pacing and atmosphere, and director and co-writer Massimo Dallamano (who based the film on an Edgar Wallace mystery novel) takes his time unravelling the tale and spotlighting an interesting cast of likely suspects along the way. He doesn't even introduce the titular Solange until very late in the game, but it's a twist that's worth waiting for (with a terrific performance from Camille Keaton) which eventually drops all the puzzle pieces neatly into place.

All the familiar elements of the giallo are here: the black-gloved assassin, the dodgiest assortment of teachers and priests you've ever seen, including a sweaty pervert who has 'red herring' stamped all over him, the element of forbidden sex, an abundance of unnecessary nudity (there are a couple of schoolgirl shower scenes that leave nothing to

the imagination) and (if you watch the English language version – both the Italian and English versions are on this disc) a preponderance of bad dubbing. Personally speaking, the Italian language version seems to be more effective, although it's difficult to get past actors speaking Italian whose characters have almost cartoonishly English names (Brenda Pilchard easily being the best).

This is a classic for a reason, and Arrow's new Blu-ray presentation is so clean it could almost convince us the film was made yesterday – if it wasn't for the unfortunate 1970s clothing and hairstyles. The special features include a commentary from Alan Jones and Kim Newman, a fascinating interview with Karin Baal which is notable (and admirable) because she definitely has mixed feelings about the finished product, and a terrific feature about Dallamano's career and the 'Schoolgirls in Peril' sequels that tenuously attempted to capitalise on Solange's success. Absolutely fantastic.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★★★★★★10



THE STRANGER

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: GUILLERMO AMOEDO / STARRING: CRISTOBAL TAPIA MONTT, LORENZA IZZO, ARIEL LEVY, LUIS GNECCO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When a mysterious man comes to town in search of his missing wife, it doesn't take long for the local contingent of yobs to set upon him, beating the poor fellow to a pulp. Good-natured graffiti artist (the lesser of two yobs) Peter rescues the man, left for dead, and nurses him back to health back at

the family home. Matters are complicated when the crooked town cop comes to finish the job and, also, it's revealed that said stranger is a vampire.

What starts with a depressive vampire being beaten to near death (again) escalates into a cycle of vengeance so very typical

of producer Eli Roth (whose name is plastered all over the film) – namely, plenty of torture and people being tied to things while angry men commit various atrocities upon their person. Thankfully, in spite of its moody, emo aesthetic, there's a sense of maturity lacking from most Roth productions, making this the easiest to enjoy in spite of its repetitiveness.

Roth's wife Lorenza Izzo pops up in a small role as the stranger's wife, and the one sympathetic guy from *The Green Inferno* is there too (playing the one sympathetic guy) but otherwise, writer/director Guillermo Amoedo does a good job of putting his own stamp on the film. It's well cast and confidently acted, with Cristobal Tapia Montt doing a sterling job as Martin (you see what they did there), managing to remain sympathetic in spite of him spending most of the film in an almost catatonic sense of sadness. The villains don't fare quite so well, descending into comic book evil by the end,

even as Luis Gnecco and the script aim for nuance in their conflicted cop De Luca.

A gritty and engaging, manly action take on *Let The Right One In*, *The Stranger* is a fine addition to the ever-growing miserable vampires subgenre.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★★★★★★7





THE ANGRY SILENCE (1960)

BD + DVD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: GUY GREEN / SCREENPLAY: BRYAN FORBES / STARRING: RICHARD ATTENBOROUGH, PIER ANGELI, MICHAEL CRAIG / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Black-and-white crime dramas from the British New Wave movement – there's something so intoxicating about these films that they almost bear a transcendent quality that puts them above being merely 'good' or 'bad'. 'Almost' is to be emphasised, however, as *The Angry Silence* is a powerful film for sure, but a film that sometimes struggles to channel its power in the right directions.

The *Angry Silence*, based

on true events, is the story of how Tom Curtis (portrayed by a mellow, post-Brighton Rock Richard Attenborough) becomes unexpectedly caught in a web of deceit, violence and treachery as he remains one of the few employees of a factory who refuse to go on an unofficial strike. What Tom himself describes as a "storm in a teacup" over ensuring stronger safety measures in the factory where he works

spirals out of control into a taut, twisted drama of morale, survival, and friendship.

Guy Green's movie is bookended with tension, but it's a film that builds and builds on that tension until everything spills over. Unfortunately, when it does spill over, things become somewhat melodramatic. Throughout the film, Tom's victimisation from his co-workers becomes grimmer and grimmer, but its climax, involving Tom losing an eye, feels jarring and out of place in the film's guttural realism and upsets the otherwise perfect delivery of the film.

In almost every other aspect though, *The Angry Silence* is an essential watch. Attenborough gives a metamorphic performance that snuggles neatly with the film's rising unease. He opens the film as an easy-going, unassuming individual, and closes as a tortured human being, broken beyond repair. Director Green paints a sublime picture of the world Tom must endure, piecing together a sumptuous rogues gallery of working-class individuals who conspire against Tom for a whole variety of reasons, ranging from the

personal to the corporate.

That rogues gallery includes New Wave stalwart Michael Craig, who also lends a hand in providing the film's script. He, Richard Gregson, and *The Stepford Wives* director Bryan Forbes create a masterclass in pace and performance. Even with that clunky climax, *The Angry Silence* is a sinewy glimpse into the darkest recesses of working-class life in Britain, and its straight-faced script, unfolding from calmness to the volatile, does the set-up justice.

The Angry Silence is an often riveting slice of semi-kitchen sink realism, but it becomes hampered by its own crumbling into melodrama. The melodrama itself may be brief, but its positioning as the finale makes that melodrama all the more noticeable. So much of *The Angry Silence* works, without a doubt, but the film also reminds us that this movement in British cinema wasn't as transcendent as history might like us to believe.

FRED MCNAMARA

★★★★★★★ 8



THE WOLFPACK

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: CRYSTAL MOSELLE / STARRING: BHAGAVAN ANGULO, GOVINDA ANGULO, JAGADISA ANGULO, KRSNA ANGULO, MUKUNDA ANGULO, NARAYANA ANGULO, CHLOE PECORINO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

High up above the streets of New York, a re-enactment of *Reservoir Dogs* is underway. In a cramped apartment, six boys with long black hair are dressed like Tarantino's most iconic characters and going through the motions with homemade props, the exact words of the script pouring from their mouths. This is *The Wolfpack*, but their story isn't all about fun and games.

It might be the hook for a lot of film buffs – the fact that these boys have spent years making their own sweded versions of Hollywood classics – but their story is really about isolation, control and the power of imagination. The boys are all brothers in the Angulo family, and for fourteen years they have been locked away with barely any experiences or interaction with the outside world.

Director Crystal Moselle found them on the streets one day, all wearing sunglasses and suits, and got chatting to the odd-looking brothers. She discovered that they had only recently started defying their tyrannical father and exploring the city that they had been shut away from for so long. *The Wolfpack* is the documentary that shares their strange, sad story with the world.

"It makes me feel like I'm living", is how one brother describes his feelings when making the re-enacted films. While all this is fun and funny to watch, *The Wolfpack* is actually a desperately tragic story. Sweding movies has been a way to keep these boys sane, as their father keeps them under lock and key, sometimes letting them out as few as nine times a year, sometimes not even once.

It's as much a history of the family as it is about the boys and their love of film. The mother is present throughout, but there is some mystery as to the whereabouts of the father for much of the film. It eventually emerges that there is not much of a mystery here at all, Moselle has just chosen to tell

the boys and their mother's story before letting their father have a say. With old home movie footage of the children being home schooled and writing out the scripts of their favourite films, it's a disturbing but ultimately hopeful picture of a family surprisingly not completely devastated by the actions of a domineering father figure (who the director lets off too easily).

While the father remains a bit of a sinister mystery, Moselle captures the boys as they venture out into the real world. It's a surreal voyage of discovery as they try train travel, stepping in the sea for the first time and also their first cinema visit.

The snippets of their sweded movies are brilliant and much-needed relief from what could have been a thoroughly depressing look at a family completely cut off from the world. *The Wolfpack* tells an incredible true story, with an admirable lack of judgement, but it could also have probed much deeper.

PETE TURNER

★★★★★★★ 7



HALO: THE FALL OF REACH

BD + DVD + VOD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: IAN KIRBY / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: JEN TAYLOR, STEVE DOWNES, MICHELLE LUKES, BRITTANY UOMOLEALE, TRAVIS WILLINGHAM / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Halo is slowly but surely making its mark as a franchise. What started out as a rather good video game has gently stretched into a full-on multi-media experience, with its own backstory and wide range of tabletop games, toys and live-action low budget

movies. One of the limitations it has, however, is that its main hero, the Master Chief, is a blank slate. Great for first-person shooters, but rubbish for storytelling.

Halo: The Fall of Reach is an attempt to fix this, and is a prequel of sorts to the

whole Halo series. Set before the invasion of the Covenant (Halo's zealous and villainous aliens), it explores the origins of Master Chief Petty Officer John-117, aka the Master Chief himself. It also goes into the nature of the super-soldier Spartan programme that gave him his remarkable abilities, and gives us some insight into the nature of his fellow troopers, Blue Squad, who are similarly enhanced.

All of this is designed to tie in with the novel of the same name, as well as foreshadow events in the recently released Halo 5. As a piece of perfectly moulded marketing, it's great. As an animated piece of entertainment, however, it falls short. Like many origin stories, the problem is that we know the ending; John becomes Master Chief. The point of the exercise should be to add depth to the character, but sadly all we get is that John-117 was a

bit sad that people died to make the Spartan super-soldiers. There's no character development, and because this is CGI, the acting is wooden and lacklustre.

The animation is not bad, but it's nothing to write home about. Unlike the excellent live-action Halo movies, CGI is unforgiving of low budgets and, coupled with unremarkable voice acting, this makes for a less than stellar feature. With a bigger budget and a tighter script, Halo: The Fall of Reach could be a tense sci-fi thriller about the lengths mankind will go to in order to survive. Instead, the result is a wasted opportunity. Halo: The Fall of Reach is destined to become a footnote in an otherwise well-managed franchise. One for the hardcore fans only.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★★ 4



FANTASTIC FOUR

BD + DVD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: JOSH TRANK / SCREENPLAY: JOSH TRANK, JEREMY SLATER, SIMON KINBERG / STARRING: MILES TELLER, KATE MARA, MICHAEL B. JORDAN, JAMIE BELL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Once more, the curse of troubled production has reared its head and the latest victim is Fantastic Four (or Fant4stic if you must). From the early days of development, this reboot had a lot to prove. The unusual casting choices, cynicism behind 20th Century Fox's ability to match Marvel Studios' recent quality and the premature announcement of a sequel

(before this was even filmed) all gained attention. However, with Josh Trank (Chronicle) behind the camera and a talented young cast, surely the results could give us something? They gave us something all right, but it was far from fantastic.

Trank's Twitter rage, on-set tensions and press conference put downs make the story behind this third attempt at

adapting Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's colourful comic book quartet a better story than the one onscreen. The film starts with ambitious kid Reed Richards attempting to crack teleportation in his garage alongside pal Ben Grimm. Ten years on, Reed (Teller) and Ben (Bell) are still at it, when their work catches the eye of scientist Franklin Storm (a Darth Vader sounding Cathey), Storm recruits them to his programme and alongside Susan Storm (Mara), his adrenaline junkie son Johnny (Jordan) and temperamental scientist Victor (Kebbell), they embark on a mission of interdimensional travel.

The dissension occurring behind the scenes is clearly visible (even if you were unaware of it going in) in this badly knitted together sci-fi B-Movie. Trank's original approach was to go darker and take inspiration from Cronenberg's Scanners, but the studio's less risky desires have diluted this idea. The most frustrating thing about this is that it could have been interesting; by focusing on the clinical and immediate implications of these confused and scared super-powered youngsters, they could have told a unique origin story. Alas, Slater, Trank, and Kinberg's drab narrative is a bust. The effects-filled latter half is spontaneous and delivered with such

lethargy it's clear everyone lost faith in what they wanted to achieve long ago. The humour fizzles out, distancing it from the colourful source material further and making Tim Story's 2005 film look stellar by comparison. This is worsened by charmless visual designs, clearly delivered by a perplexed team unsure of the film they were actually making.

There are passing moments suggesting how great the cast could have been. Sadly, the characters are shackled by the shambolic script ("you made it ugly") and stripped of their vibrancy. Reed is a supple sulk, Susan and Johnny do next to nothing and The Thing hardly makes his presence felt at all - aside from the one effective medical scene. But the biggest crime is Kebbell's Victor Von Doom, who's irrelevant until 25 minutes before the credits, when he is properly revealed and looks less like a master maniacal sorcerer and more like a man in a melted gimp suit. As reimaginings go, this is creatively constipated, torpedoed by egos and studios, badly written, and frankly bugged.

Extras: Featurettes / Concept Art

JACK BOTTOMLEY

★★★★★★★★★★ 2



THE GIFT

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JOEL EDGERTON / STARRING: JASON BATEMAN, REBECCA HALL, JOEL EDGERTON, ALLISON TOLMAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Increasingly, actors turn their hand to directing (Ben Affleck, Angelina Jolie, Joseph Gordon-Levitt). The results vary, but it's always interesting to see what a star in front of a camera can do behind one. However, Joel Edgerton has gone a step further in writing, directing and co-starring in his first feature, *The Gift*. It's certainly risky and, on paper, this blend of thriller, drama and horror sounds like the usual home invasion/stalker formula. However, Edgerton counts

on this oversight on the audience's part and creates one of the year's most suspenseful, surprising and refreshing features.

Married couple Simon (Bateman) and Robyn Callum (Hall) move into their new home, when by chance they meet a very generous man called Gordon (Edgerton) who used to be a friend of Simon's at school. What seems at first like a friendship soon opens up into something darker, as Robyn discovers more about this man and his past with

her husband. Take our advice: cease reading anything about the film's plot and go in fresh because Edgerton's film boasts Hitchcock-influenced suspense that keeps you glued to the screen from start to brain-drillingly effective finish.

This effective story reaches far with its ideas of existential and moral dimensions to human life, slowly building without cheap gimmicks and restraining from over-the-top silliness. The film pleasingly toys with your perceptions, subverting them with a compelling story of man's power to lie and destroy lives for either personal gain or sick pleasure. And as for the final twist, the less said the better; all we will say is that it is the best delivered finale twist in a horror suspense film since *Tobin Bell* got up from that bog room floor in *Saw*.

Funnyman Bateman is on top form playing things straight and in the process gives us a lead in Simon who becomes far deeper than anticipated. Meanwhile, Hall is excellent as his wife Robyn, who's without doubt the film's most sympathetic character; Hall makes her believable and rational. Then there's

Edgerton who, as Gordon (or 'Gordo') is onscreen less, but his impact is felt in every fabric of the narrative, and he constantly challenges your viewing interpretation.

This film makes the occasional logical oversight, but you'd have to be very pithy to hold that against it. In all, the direction, like the writing, is executed with such professionalism that it's hard to believe Edgerton is making his directorial debut and it leaves us eager to see what else he does next. *The Gift* doesn't sacrifice entertainment to morally lecture; it injects an edge-of-seat and cautionary tale with cruel humanity, fun, intrigue, twists, and scares. Like all the best gifts, this film comes as a complete surprise and is one you will be unwrapping in your head days after viewing. In fact, you may rethink just how you have treated people in the past... beware of presents on your doorstep!

Extras: *Featurettes / Deleted Scenes / Audio Commentary*

JACK BOTTOMLEY

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



NO ESCAPE

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JOHN ERICK DOWDLE / SCREENPLAY: JOHN ERICK DOWDLE, DREW DOWDLE / STARRING: OWEN WILSON, LAKE BELL, PIERCE BROSNAN, STERLING JERINS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

A simple yet terrifyingly believable and relevant story, performances that capture the sheer terror of the situation, direction that places you at the centre of an unfolding crisis: *No Escape* is a truly exhausting viewing experience. It's also fantastically enthralling.

Hours after landing in an

unnamed South Asian country that is to be their new home, Jack (Owen Wilson) and Annie (Lake Bell), along with their two young daughters, find themselves in the midst of a revolution. Armed rebels are patrolling the streets and attacking anyone who they perceive to be the enemy, with special, fatal attention being

paid to any foreigners. One way or another, Jack and his family must find a way out.

After an opening fifteen minutes with some fairly sedate scene setting, *No Escape* sets off at a hurricane-like pace that doesn't let up until the final few moments. Disturbing, uncomfortable but utterly engaging throughout, this is a film that contains more squirm-inducing, hold-your-breath scenes than you will find at an entire horror festival. This, combined with an emotional rawness that is strangely relatable despite how extreme the situation may be, makes the film reluctantly entertaining and unbearably watchable.

Director John Erick Dowdle has a background in making films at the better end of the found footage spectrum, and this style of direction clearly influenced his work on *No Escape*. Filmed using handheld cameras, Dowdle places the audience in the middle of the action and creates a sense of fearful mystery as

you experience events in real time with the family. The performances in that central unit are superb, with both Wilson and Bell captivating, but it is the two young girls that deserve most credit. Sterling Jerins and Claire Geare have fear etched so deeply into their innocent expressions that you have to remind yourself this is only acting. With Pierce Brosnan making an impressive, if slightly exposition-heavy, appearance as a shadowy government agent, this is an ensemble cast without weakness.

It is difficult to satisfactorily convey just how suspenseful this film is. Taking inspiration from John Carpenter's classic *Escape from New York* and Oliver Stone's *Salvador*, *No Escape* manages to surpass both in delivering gruelling tension. This isn't a film to watch repeatedly, but it is certainly one you should watch at least once.

JOHN TOWNSEND

★★★★★★★★★★ 8

AUDIOSTATIC

THE LATEST NEWS
FROM THE WORLD OF
AUDIO ADVENTURES
BY TONY JONES



Horror Actor Releases Album of Lovecraft Tales

Laurence R. Harvey, star of **The Human Centipede 2** and **3**, has just released an album containing two classic H. P. Lovecraft stories. The actor's eerie delivery of **From Beyond** and **The Hound** are set to an atmospheric score by The Duke St Workshop, a group who create electronic soundtracks for imaginary films. The tales have been edited for the recording by John 'The Baptist' Togher and are a mesmerising blend of moody soundscapes and fascinating delivery. Released on Static Caravan records, the extremely limited edition vinyl (300 only!) is set to become a collectors' item, so seek it out while you can. The pairing of the band and actor also performed a live show, showcasing the material at London's Union Chapel in January, and they hope to recreate the experience again in other towns.

Online Collaboration Brings New Free Audio Dramas

A group called Against the Crowd have begun recording and distributing newly recorded dramas online for free. They focus on sci-fi and horror stories, mainly bespoke, but also some out-of-copyright classics. While they are a non-professional group, the productions are of a very high standard and well worth checking out. The stories recorded so far can be found on **soundcloud.com/againstthecrowdproductions** and they are always on the lookout for new members to join in the creative process.

BBC Audio Drama Award Finalists

Following months of voting, the finalists in the prestigious BBC Audio Drama Awards were announced. Among the big nominees are **Vampyre Man**, a play about the collaboration and often intense friendship between **Dracula** author Bram Stoker and Henry Irving, the Victorian actor whom Stoker managed. As well as being up for the Tinniswood Radio Drama Award for Best Radio Drama Script, Anton Lesser is in the running for Best Actor in an Audio Drama.

The BBC production of the Asian horror film **Ring**, which was broadcast under the **Fright Night** banner last Halloween,

is nominated for Best Use of Sound in an Audio Drama, while Best Online-Only Audio Drama nominees include Spiteful Puppet Entertainment Ltd's **Hood: King's Command**, and Big Finish's **The Omega Factor: The Old Gods**.

The award ceremony takes place in the Radio Theatre at BBC Broadcasting House, London on Sunday, January 31st. The host will be actor/comedian Sir Lenny Henry. STARBURST wishes all the finalists the best of luck.

More DARK SHADOWS on the Way

Big Finish has announced that their popular audio version of Gothic soap opera **Dark Shadows** will return in June with a 50th Anniversary Special. Last year's **Dark Shadows: Bloodlust** has been shortlisted for a BBC Audio Drama Award, and following the special, you can return to Collinsport in a new 13-part serial, **Dark Shadows: Bloodline** in the autumn.

BIG FINISH WE LOVE STORIES

Key titles to watch out for this month from Big Finish...

THE AVENGERS - THE LOST EPISODES: VOL 5

Continuing the adventures of Steed and Keel (Julian Wadham and Anthony Howell, respectively) from the long-lost first series of the classic telefantasy show, this collection contains four more stories recreated from the scraps of information left when the original tapes were wiped. *Doctor Who* regular Dan Starkey writes the first, *Nightmare*.

AVAILABLE JANUARY 31st

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DOCTOR WHO: MAIN RANGE #208

THE WATERS OF AMSTERDAM

A new adventure for the Fifth Doctor and his companions Tegan and Nyssa. The ever-popular Peter Davison returns with Janet Fielding and Sarah Sutton reprising their television roles in the first of a series of stories that follow on from the 1983 serial *Arc of Infinity*.

AVAILABLE JANUARY 31st

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DOCTOR WHO: THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES 5.1 WAVE OF DESTRUCTION

Tom Baker's Fourth Doctor continues to excite in these two-part stories, this time joined by fellow Time Lord companion Romana (Lalla Ward) and trusty tin dog K-9 (John Leeson). Here, they investigate sound waves that may be heralding an alien invasion.

AVAILABLE JANUARY 31st

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THE PRISONER VOLUME 1

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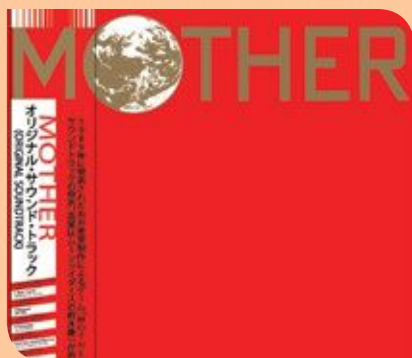
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REVIEWS

THE LATEST AUDIO
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



MOTHER (1989)

COMPOSER: KEIICHI SUZUKI, HIROKAZU TANAKA /
LABEL: SHIP TO SHORE PHONOGRAPH COMPANY /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Mother is the perfect example of a record which grows on you. This score is such an interesting beast that one feels almost compelled to listen to it just given the story behind its recording, despite whether one knows the game, cares for video game music, or has even a passing interest in Japanese pop. The music for the game Mother was so absurdly popular that the company behind went into the studio with a full orchestra and re-recorded all of the music, in some cases with vocals.

The orchestral versions of the music are big and epic, yet still bring to mind the

limitations of the late '80s Famicom console. You have Catherine Warwick, an American woman, signing in a Japanese pop vein. It's just all so strange that one can't help but put the needle on the record, and it's then that you're absolutely sucked in by the fact that this is really interesting music.

On just the first track, there's that J-Pop by way of America vocals, rock guitars, what sounds like an electronic harpsichord, and strange synth fireworks. Visiting it in this context, at a remove of several decades, the music for Mother resembles nothing so much as something like the Trans-Siberian Orchestra or Electric Light Orchestra – bands that take elements of multiple genres and stack them upon one another until you're not quite sure as to what you're hearing. The Paradise Line could have easily been written by Jeff Lynne, and it could also be slowed down to the tempo of its toy piano to become a stealthily eerie approximation of Japanese traditional music.

As a matter of fact, that's precisely what the track which follows it is: Magicant is a loopingly weird concoction which bleeps and burbles, yet still sounds rooted in the music of a centuries-old teahouse. It's counterbalanced by the ever-so-modern sounds of the flip side's last song, All That I Needed (Was You), another track which brings ELO to mind, but with a more brightly '80s sensibility.

The light disco funk of Fallin' Love,

seems like it's from another world entirely. It's lush and string-filled, while a wah-wah guitar anchors everything. It seems more suited for a soft-focus love scene than anything related to a video game, but it's certainly in line with its title. The final track of the re-recording, Eight Melodies, is a lovely bit of organ-backed choral music, but it's a flat end to what's otherwise been an interesting ride through stylistic exercises.

For sheer, unfettered delight, take the entirety of Side D – which is one epic track entitled The World of Mother, containing excerpts from the original game soundtrack – and match its component pieces to the tracks which have preceded it. To hear how these pieces were stretched and changed, yet still manage to remain true to their original form, is astonishing.

The gatefold sleeve is of the hefty tip-on variety, and while the obi strip only barely contains it, the outer packaging is akin to finding a lost gem somewhere in the depths of a Shibuya record shop.

Would your reviewer have bought this himself, given the opportunity? Likely not. However, there's no reason you should make the same mistake. Ship to Shore's release of the Mother score is absolutely the best surprise you could give yourself.

NICK SPACEK

★★★★★★★★★ 9



KLUTE

COMPOSER: MICHAEL SMALL / LABEL: HARKIT RECORDS / RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 18TH

It comes as a huge surprise that the soundtrack to the 1971 movie Klute is actually very tricky to lay your hands on. A lot of Michael Small's scores were issued in small numbers and sometimes never at

all, and this is no exception. Which is a huge shame as this one, in particular, is just as classic as the movie itself. Copies change hands on auction sites for well over £100, which is why Harkit Records has issued us with a special 5-track 7-inch EP version of the highlights.

Most of the action in the movie takes place on either a swinging '100 Club' style dance floor or in a darkened room with very creepy goings-on. This is reflected in the two different styles of the tracks on here. It also made sense to split the two moods over the two different sides of the 7-inch.

Side One opens up with the desolate sounding Main Theme, which if it wasn't for the visuals already present in the movie would conjure up a long forgotten arctic weather station packed solid with ice and bitter wind. Let's throw in some John Carpenter thawed-out shape-shifting greenies for good measure (this is STARBURST, after all).

Next up is the Love Theme that, being quite honest, does share way more than just its name with the Vangelis track on the Blade Runner score. Finishing Side One off is

Rooftop Intruder, which takes the disturbing piano from the opener and adds a deranged but beautiful female siren call over the top.

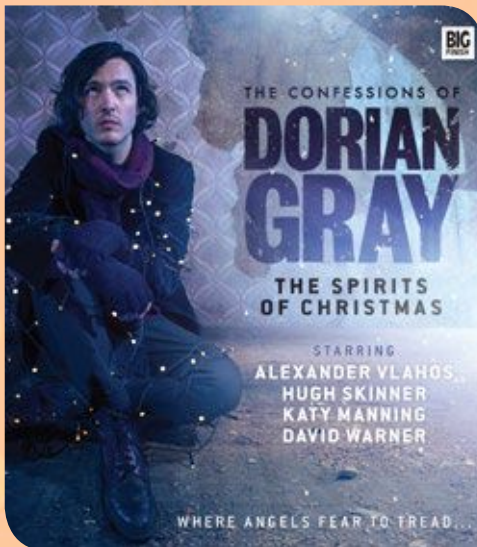
Club Scene kicks in with a wallop on Side Two just as it does in the movie. It's very obvious that this picture came out in 1971 just as the musical landscape of the late '60s was changing into a more psychedelic-influenced rock. Heavy and fast distorted guitar licks and drum fills that Roger Taylor could 'do his beans' over aplenty. Lastly is Bree's Abandon (Take it Higher), which has a more funky and soulful sound. Some serious air being pushed in and out of Claudia Lennear's lungs too at the end of the track make a huge crescendo, but then that's it and at just over six minutes each side it is over way too soon. The addition of the dynamic and anthemic Goldfarb's Fantasy could have gone some way to fixing this, but as it stands this is a great introduction to a bigger iconic soundtrack.

Groovy baby, yeah!

PHIL PERRY

★★★★★★★★★ 8

STARBURST



**THE CONFESSIONS OF DORIAN GRAY:
THE SPIRITS OF CHRISTMAS**

DIRECTOR: SCOTT HANDCOCK / **AUTHOR:** TIM LENG, ALAN FLANAGAN / **PUBLISHER:** BIG FINISH / **STARRING:** ALEXANDER VLAHOS, HUGH SKINNER, DAVID WARNER, GABRIEL WOOLF, COLIN MCFARLANE / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Big Finish's reinterpreted rapsallion immortal Dorian Gray returns for a festive special, in a pair of hour-long episodes invoking the spirit of Christmas horror, an appropriate seasonal tradition given the long dark evenings of the time of year. With Dorian now established in a

relationship with Toby and happier than at any point in his century-plus long existence, these two narrated full-cast audio dramas comprise the story of perhaps his greatest ever fall – and it isn't like there hasn't been some stiff competition.

Tim Leng's first disc takes a recognisably grim if unusual premise and attempts to spin a

ghoulish tale from it, in an instalment filled with familiar voice cameos and macabre imagery – imagery too ghastly for a visual medium to be sure. *Desperately Seeking Santa* begins with a grisly presence waking up in someone's attic, wreaking bloodshed upon the house's owners. It's not

long before Gray becomes involved in a typically fitting fashion, but unfortunately any authorial thoughtfulness isn't carried through into the plotting; in spite of David Warner's suitably gruesome Santa Claus, there's a sense here that Leng couldn't work out how to carry his characters from one circumstance to the next without allowing them to drive one another between situations, and in spite of some great acting, extraordinary ideas and the kind of sinister atmosphere these sets have made us accustomed to, *Desperately Seeking Santa* is a slightly unfulfilling affair, never quite earning its resolutions. Fortunately, it serves perfectly well as an aperitif to disc two, wherein the real meat of this pairing is to be found.

In *All Through the House* by Alan Flanagan, Toby and Dorian fetch up at the Hotel Brigadoon just in time to celebrate Christmas itself, but when Gray spots his long-dead sister (Katy Manning having the time of her life) at a neighbouring table, it's just the first indication that something supremely sinister is taking place – something that Dorian and Toby ultimately find themselves right in the very heart of. Featuring a sublime

performance from Gary Russell soundalike Tom Allen as the hotel manager, and Gabriel Woolf in at last the role he was born to play, Flanagan's episode takes another familiar scenario and builds it around the central character's distinctive characteristic in a beguilingly compelling manner, the extended running time of these Christmas specials allowing for a little extra sinew on the usually taut *Confessions* format – until the double twist at the end that will leave most listeners thoroughly satisfied.

Of the two plays included here, Flanagan's is easily the more accomplished, but taken as a whole there is plenty of colour and a rich palette of characters to enjoy far beyond the star turns by Warner and Woolf. If you're of the persuasion that the midwinter festival is a time for the partaking of something spooky, then *The Spirits of Christmas* might be just the treat you're looking for.

Extras: Interviews / Isolated score / Bonus short story "Frostbite"

J.R. SOUTHALL

★★★★★★★ 8



**STAR WARS:
THE FORCE AWAKENS**

AUTHORS: ALAN DEAN FOSTER, MICHAEL KOGGE / **NARRATOR:** MARC THOMPSON / **PUBLISHER:** DISNEY / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

By now, most diehard Star Wars fans will know the plot of *The Force Awakens* off by heart. The reviews have been (mostly) enthusiastic and the general consensus seems to be that this is the film audiences have been awaiting for a very long time, the natural successor to George Lucas's original ground-breaking science fiction trilogy and the chance to finally dust those nasty prequels under the carpet and pretend they never really

happened.

Without giving any spoilers away, *The Force Awakens* takes place many years after the events of *Return of the Jedi*. The old Empire has renamed itself the First Order and General (don't call her Princess) Leia Organa still leads the resistance. The First Order are in pursuit of BB-8, a droid that contains information vital to the Resistance, which is currently stranded on the desert planet Jakku. After falling into a scavenger's net, BB-8 is rescued by a young woman called Rey who quickly finds out she's in a lot of trouble, but it is only when Rey and BB-8 meet Finn, an ex-stormtrooper who is also being hunted by the First Order, that their adventures really begin.

As a film, *The Force Awakens* looks and sounds sensational and, aside from all the new cast members, it also marks the welcome return of the trilogy's best-loved characters – Han Solo, Leia Organa and Luke Skywalker (in fact, *The Force Awakens* is very much Han Solo's story.)

On the big screen, it is a hugely impressive and emotional experience, so how can the audiobook possibly compete?

Unfortunately, it doesn't compete very well. This is an unabridged version of Alan Dean Foster's novelisation, and Marc Thompson is a fantastic narrator who only really has problems when he tries to capture the female voices – Rey and Leia – and gets them so wrong it's unintentionally funny. Would this matter to listeners who haven't seen the movie? Maybe not, although Thompson's version of Rey makes her sound less like a resistance-worthy heroine and more like the slightly confused offspring of Nanny McPhee, which is a tad disorienting.

On the plus side, Thompson does a pretty good Han Solo and a reasonable C-3PO. Authentic Wookiee growls, cute droid bleeping and familiar music cues from the soundtrack also break up the narration very nicely.

But the biggest problem lies in Alan Dean Foster's sometimes turgid prose, which

often feels very over-cooked. That's a surprise because he's usually a fantastic writer and really knows how to adapt a screenplay into a novel with tremendous depth and detail, conjuring up the images in front of our eyes. His original novelisation of *Star Wars*, which he ghost-wrote as George Lucas, and his standalone *Star Wars* novel *Splinter of the Mind's Eye* (as well as his *Alien* and *Aliens* adaptations) are still classics of the genre and rightfully so. Somehow, though, his retelling of *The Force Awakens* doesn't carry the same kind of punch. Or, more likely, Alan Dean Foster's books are better read straight from the page than aloud as an audiobook. For this reviewer, *The Force Awakens* audiobook lacked excitement, and the ten hours-plus running time dragged far too often. Maybe those who haven't already seen the story on the big screen will enjoy it more.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★★★ 6

OST

THE STARBURST
GUIDE TO THE LATEST
SOUNDTRACKS
BY NICK SPACEK



Jean DiBona, is a trippy vocal affair, and does an excellent job of not only referencing the likes of classic '70s films, but also utilising strings in a way not done since the heyday of Bernard Herrmann. The film's getting comparisons to the Golden Age of Argento, and we're hoping that once we hear the entire score, it will, too.

Milan Records released Leon Ko's score to the massively successful Chinese action-adventure comedy **Monster Hunt**. The film, with its mix of CGI monsters and live-action actors, has become China's top-earning domestic film of all time, and by all accounts is an amazingly fun time in the theatre. The score's only available digitally at the moment from European retailers, but even if you're the sort who must have some form of physical product for your music, this is worth getting. It's big and rollicking, and this version actually includes a digital booklet, which is something worth supporting.

Tom Salta's score for **Halo: The Fall of Reach** is out now via iTunes and other digital music retailers, in conjunction with the animated series' release on Blu-ray and DVD earlier last month. Salta's music is the mix of orchestral and electronic work we've come to expect from the **Halo** franchise, but this particular collection has a very martial feel to it. It's not overly militaristic, but you'll certainly snap to when it starts playing. Of a completely different musical tone is the final track, *Take This Life*, which is a full-on pop track.

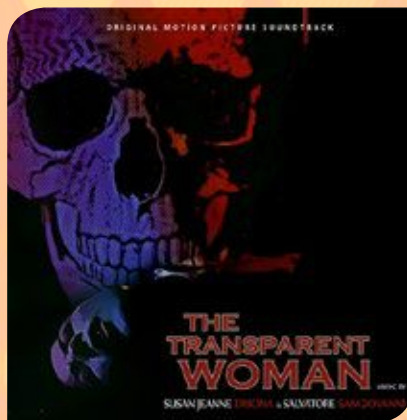
In other video game news, Jack Wall's music for **Call of Duty: Black Ops III** is out from Activision, and it also features a couple of pop tunes. Wall's take on pop music is less modern and hearkens back to '40s swing, and goes with **Black Ops III**'s zombie campaign, *Shadows of Evil*. The score also includes all of the music for the game proper, and in keeping with the game's elements of subterfuge, reminds one far more of a thriller

Waxwork Records was named 'Label of the Year' by website Modern Vinyl, and I think we can all see why, especially given the announcement they dropped right before the holidays regarding their upcoming slate of releases. In addition to already-named awesomeness such as **Evil Dead 2** and **Black Christmas**, the label's 2016 titles just slay: Richard Einhorn's score to the 1977 Nazi zombie thriller **Shock Waves**; Paul Zaza's never-before-released score for the 1981 holiday slasher **My Bloody Valentine**; a deluxe remastered Pino Donaggio score to the 1981 werewolf flick **The Howling**; as well as the 1967 stop-motion classic **Mad Monster Party**. Get your wallet ready.

Terror Vision has been teasing their next batch of releases as well, and while nothing's been announced for certain other than what we already knew, it looks like the label will be working with the Godfather of Gore himself, Herschell Gordon Lewis, for some 2016 releases. Given that only two of Lewis' scores have ever seen complete releases – a 1984 LP on Rhino gave us **2000 Maniacs** and **Blood Feast** – there's quite a bit of music to dig into, beyond what was

offered on the 2002 compilation CD, **The Eye-Popping Sounds of Herschell Gordon Lewis**, on Birdman Records. Fingers crossed for **Something Weird**.

Kronos Records continue a spate of excellent compact disc releases with the upcoming limited edition score to the neo-giallo **The Transparent Woman**. The score, by duo Salvatore Sangiovanni and Susan



than balls-out action. There's some subtlety in Wall's music that deserves a closer listen.

iam8bit's back on track with the announcement of an amazing vinyl release for the music to popular MMO **Guild Wars 2: Heart of Thorns**. The double LP set features music by MacLaine Diemer, Lena Chappelle, and Stan LePard. It's not only the first time the entire score to the game will be available on vinyl, but the first time the music will be available in its entirety anywhere. It comes on splattery/marble-y green 180-gram vinyl, and while it won't likely ship until spring, you get a digital download code emailed to you within 48 hours of purchase, so you can crank the tunes on the go. We can't wait to hear how this mix of Renaissance folk music and sweepingly majestic music go together as a standalone release.

Coming out in early February from La-La Land is the score to the very fun, hilarious, and surprisingly thoughtful zom-com **Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse**. Composer Matthew Margeson continues his string of action comedy scores with this bit of pumping orchestral work with occasional nods to its horror elements. It's a limited edition of 1000 copies on compact disc, but it's already available digitally from most online retailers.

Full Moon Pictures continues its vinyl reissue cavalcade this month with the heretofore unreleased score to 1985's **Trancers**, as composed by Phil Davies and Mark Ryder. There's been quite a demand for this for years and years, with hints and promises that it would be out at various times, going all the way back to the original VHS cover declaring that a soundtrack was available from Radioactive Records.



Regardless of website promises and video cover art, there's a pre-order available on Amazon, and we hope that the new cover art pictured means that we'll have a chance to hear the eerie synth score in some format other than YouTube clips.

While the music for the first two instalments of the Japanese cyberpunk **Tetsuo** trilogy, **The Iron Man** and **Body Hammer**, were released on CD back in the late '90s, along with a complete box set of all three scores from Sony International in 2010, the score's never seen a vinyl release. Composer Chu Ishikawa's grinding, industrial score finally comes out on vinyl from Japanese label Kaijyu Theater. The tracklisting is the same as the previous compact disc releases, but for those looking to have it in another format, here's your chance.

The ever-experimental We Release Whatever the Fuck We Want label is putting out an absolutely bonkers package of the

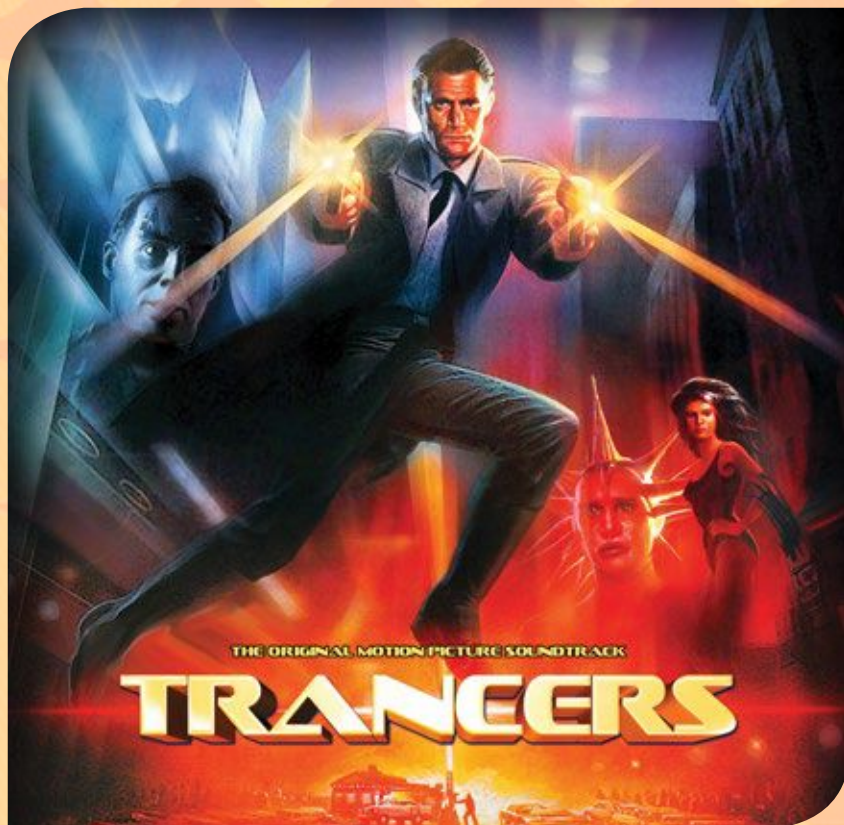


score to John Carpenter's first film, **Dark Star**. It's an LP containing all the various incidental electronics, along with special effects and dialogue snippets – essentially the film on record – along with a 7-inch featuring sound effects loops, as well as the much-demanded bit of easy listening from Martin Segundo and the Scintilla Strings, *When Twilight Falls on NGC 891* and a super-secret bonus track. It's all been remastered for vinyl and has us fairly well salivating at the prospect of listening.

One Way Static's next release is another dive into the world of cannibal film scores. This time, it's music from Stelvio Cipriani, in the form of the score to 1978's **Papaya, Love Goddess of the Cannibals**. It's full of exotic strings, with an undercurrent of funk, as one would expect from both the genre and composer. It's available on vinyl LP or cassette, and if you get the latter, there are seven more cues that aren't available on the LP. The tape's limited to 200 copies, with the vinyl limited to 500 copies, each on clear with pink haze and pink/green split vinyl.

We're not usually into scores to action comedies – especially sequels – but the news regarding the score to the Kevin Hart and Ice Cube flick, **Ride Along 2**, has us intrigued. Christopher Lennertz, who scored the original (as well as **Marvel's Agent Carter**) joined up with trumpeter Arturo Sandoval and former Prince drummer Sheila E. to make this score. It's such a wide-ranging group of talented musicians, we can't help but suggest you take a minute to check it out, just to see what's been given us.

It's been a good long while since we've seen a label come on the scene, so what better way to end the first column of the new year than with the discovery of a new one? Based out of Massachusetts in the States comes Eczema Records, who have 'a focus on rare and unreleased soundtracks.' Their first release is going to be a real swerve from all the horror and sci-fi fare that's the current hot stuff, as it's the score to the 1983 sex comedy **Joysticks**. The Ray Knehnetsky-composed, Legion-performed music from the Joe Don Baker arcade romp hasn't even been released, but you can have it pumping through your ears right now if you hit their website and get the digital version. If you're the patient type who likes their purchases tangible, the pink vinyl, limited to 1000 copies, is out this spring and up now for pre-order.



BRAVE NEW WORDS

FAHRENHEIT

451

Bradbury Honoured by Internet Error Code

The Internet code for censorship has now been confirmed as a '451 Error', in honour of much-loved science fiction literary icon Ray Bradbury. The code takes its inspiration from **Fahrenheit 451**; Bradbury's well known (and highly regarded) novel about a dystopian American future in which books are outlawed and 'firemen' burn any that are found. The independent body that promotes Internet standards, the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) have been working on this for the last two years. Mark Nottingham, chair of the IETF HTTP Working Group said "By its nature, you can't guarantee that all attempts to censor content will be conveniently labelled by the censor." He added, "Although 451 can be used both by network-based intermediaries (such as a firewall) as well as on the origin Web server, I suspect it's going to be used far more in the latter case, as Web sites like GitHub, Twitter, Facebook, and Google are forced to censor content against their will in certain jurisdictions."

Obituary: George Clayton Johnson

Science fiction writer George Clayton Johnson has died aged 86, after losing a long battle with cancer. He is best known for his work on **Logan's Run**, which he co-wrote with William F. Nolan. It was later made into an Oscar-nominated movie. Johnson penned the first episode of **Star Trek** and wrote the **Twilight Zone** episodes *Kick the Can* and *Nothing in The Dark*. He also collaborated with Ray Bradbury on the 1962 Oscar-nominated animated short film **Icarus Montgolfier Wright**. Johnson is survived by two children and his wife, Lola Johnson.

Obituary: Peter Dickinson

Award-winning writer Peter Dickinson has died on his 88th birthday, following a brief illness. The fantasy author is best known for his Carnegie Medal-winning books **Tulku** and **City of Gold**. He was the first person to win the prestigious children's book award twice. He was nominated for the Carnegie Medal a total of nine times.

Born in Africa but educated in England, Dickinson began his career by writing for satirical magazine **Punch**. He wrote over 60 books, and his work was translated into 53 languages. A fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and former chairman of the Society of Authors, Dickinson was awarded an OBE for services to literature in 2009. He is survived by his four children and his wife, the children's fantasy author Robin McKinley.

Young Adult Novel to Become Opera

Danish author Janne Teller's Young Adult novel **Nothing** is to be made into an opera by the Glyndebourne Youth Opera. **Nothing** is the tale of a boy who climbs a tree after declaring that life has no meaning. As the boy's friends attempt to prove him wrong, they discover a deeper and

darker truth. The opera version has been adapted from the novel by composer David Bruce, who also adapted Philip Pullman's **The Firework Maker's Daughter**, and will be directed by Bijan Sheibani, who is better known for his work on **War Horse** and **Ghosts, or, Those Who Return**.

Cassandra Clare Comes to Netflix

The TV adaptation of Cassandra Clare's bestselling YA fantasy novels, **The Mortal Instruments**, is now available on Netflix. The show is also being shown in the US on the ABC Family network. The episodes will be released weekly. The series, called **Shadowhunters**, stars Katherine McNamara as Clary Fray. The main plot focuses on Clary, who discovers that she has the blood of angels running through her veins. She uses this legacy to hunt down the demons that lurk in the world.

Pratchett Play to Début in Oxfordshire

TERRY PRATCHETT: the Shakespeare Codex is to début at The Unicorn Theatre, Oxfordshire (UK) this April. The play draws its inspiration from Pratchett's books **The Science of Discworld II: The Globe** and **Lords and Ladies**. It also draws upon Shakespeare's **A Midsummer Night's Dream** and has been written by well-regarded Pratchett collaborator Stephen Briggs. The Unicorn Theatre has hosted all 21 of the Studio Theatre Club's World Premiere **Discworld** plays, all of which have gone on to be performed by groups worldwide.

Rowling Loves Latest Harry Potter Casting

Harry Potter creator J. K. Rowling has tweeted her support for the casting of **Harry Potter and the Cursed Child**. The cast includes Jamie Parker as an adult Harry Potter, Paul Thornley as Ron Weasley, and Noma Dumezweni as Hermione. The casting of Dumezweni caused some to contact Rowling via Twitter, as Noma is a distinctly different choice from Emma Watson, who played the role of Hermione in the movies. Rowling responded on with the following tweet: 'Canon: brown eyes, frizzy hair and very clever. White skin was never specified. Rowling loves black Hermione'.

STARBURST's own book podcast, **THE BOOKWORM**, is filled with all the latest news, reviews and interviews and can be found on Twitter @radiobookworm

COMING SOON



ADVENTURE TIME: THE ENCHIRIDION & MARCY'S SUPER SECRET SCRAPBOOK

AUTHOR: M. OLSON, O. OLSON, T. MILLIONAIRE

PUBLISHER: TITAN

RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 12TH

The **Enchiridion** is the ancient hero handbook that can be found in the Land of Ooo. This book combines its secrets of Heroing with the private notes and scraps of the vampire Marceline. This in-world style artefact should delight fans of **Adventure Time**, and delves into the show's darkest post-apocalyptic secret. The book promises to have the mix of cutesy charm and dark humour that makes **Adventure Time** the hit it is amongst kids of all ages.



THE MORTAL TALLY

AUTHOR: SAM SYKES

PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 31ST

Sam Sykes has been compared favourably to both Scott Lynch and Fritz Leiber, and it's easy to see why. His work has an easy going charm that makes it very hard to put down and a lot of fun to read. The **Mortal Tally** is the much talked-about sequel to **The City Stained Red**. With the city of C'Jer Daal, falling into ruin, it's up to the reluctant hero Lenk to find the monster that has caused all this suffering and put an end to it all, possibly at the cost of his own soul.



SILVER TIDE

AUTHOR: JEN WILLIAMS

PUBLISHER: HEADLINE

RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 25TH

We utterly adored **The Copper Promise** and **The Iron Guest**, and Jen Williams has returned with the final book in **The Copper Cat** trilogy, **Silver Tide**. This time round, the Black Feather Three, after seeing off giant mechanical monsters and god-like dragons, face their greatest foe, Wydrin's

mother, who just happens to be the most dangerous pirate the world has ever seen. Expect dead gods, mad magic, piracy on the high seas, peculiar turns and pure fantasy fun.



RUNAWAY VAMPIRE: AN ARGENEAU NOVEL

AUTHOR: LYNsay SANDS

PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ

RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 23RD

Sexy vampire time, done in a way that should appeal to all sort of tastes (and without a single sparkle). When a naked, injured, insanely gorgeous young man clambers into Mary Winslow's RV, she more than raises an eyebrow when he insists that they belong together. Problem is, Mary is rather tempted, feeling a near-supernatural connection. Will Mary risk her life for this mysterious immortal who seems to know her every desire? Will she break free from his magnetic grasps and run him through with a sharpened stick? We don't know, but each page promises to smoulder with erotic tension, so there's that.



DOCTOR WHO - CHOOSE THE FUTURE: NIGHT OF THE KRAKEN

AUTHOR: JONATHAN GREEN

PUBLISHER: PENGUIN

RELEASE DATE: APRIL 18TH

Jonathan Green is the master of Choose Your Own adventure-style books, and has an impressive number of tie-in novels under his belt. In **Night of the Kraken**, the Twelfth Doctor meets a roguish time-smuggler and faces a creature from the deep who threatens to end all life on the planet Earth, the Doctor's favourite planet. We're confident that Green will bring his unique style of puzzle adventure and wacky ideas to the world of **Doctor Who**. We are looking forward to turning to page 400.



SUPERNATURAL: COLD FIRE

AUTHOR: JOHN PASSARELLA

PUBLISHER: TITAN

RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 26TH

Bram Stoker Award-winning author John Passarella brings us a tale featuring everyone's favourite monster-hunting siblings in **Supernatural: Cold Fire**. This tie-in novel pits the iconic Sam and Dean Winchester (from the hit TV show) against an eye-eating monster that seems to be at the root of a series of dark secrets in the sleepy American town of Braden Heights, Indiana. The book will also feature the talents of the charming and unearthly Castiel, and promises the usual sort of heart-pounding horror and knuckle-biting angst that we've come to expect from the show.



INTO EVERYWHERE

AUTHOR: PAUL MCAULEY

PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ

RELEASE DATE: APRIL 21ST

We described McAuley's **Something Coming Through** as 'future history at its very best'. **Into Everywhere** is the much-anticipated sequel. With Humanity's future disrupted by the mysterious Jackaroo, mankind has spread to other worlds. Humanity swiftly uncovers a dozen previous civilisations, previous benefactors of the Jackaroo. As Humanity begins to explore the galaxy, can it overcome its own inherent nature and become the heirs to the galaxy, or will it add its name to the long list of dead races? We reckon it's going to be fun to find out.



THE LATTER FIRE (STAR TREK: TOS)

AUTHOR: JAMES SWALLOW

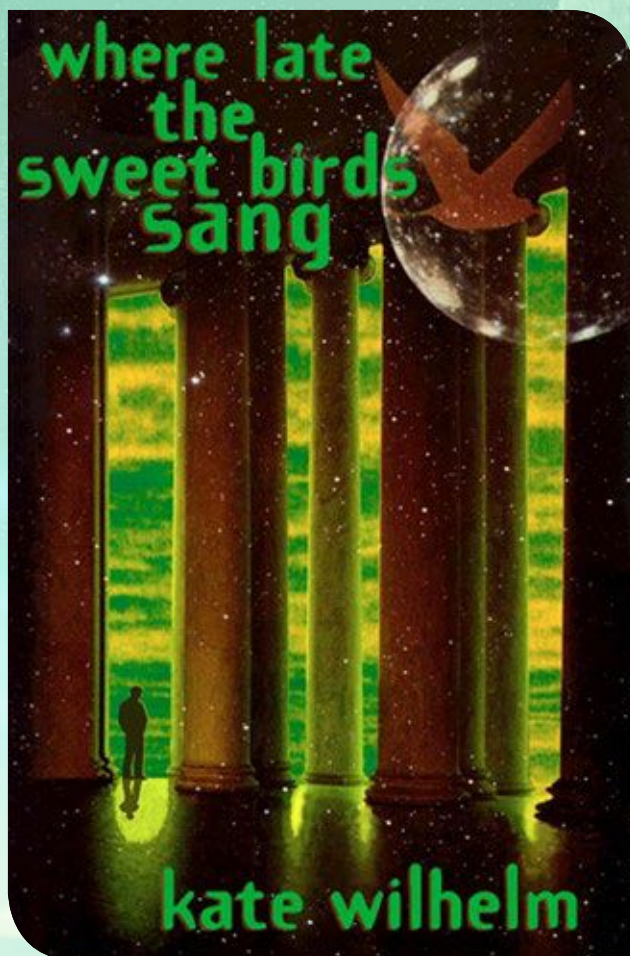
PUBLISHER: POCKET BOOKS

RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 23RD

You can rely on James Swallow to deliver the best in Star Trek fiction. The crew of the Starship Enterprise are in yet another tricky first contact situation on their five-year mission. Thanks to the leadership of Captain James T. Kirk, the ship is boldly going to Syhaar Prime, the home world of an alien civilisation preparing to take its first steps on to the galactic stage. But there's a catch. Could it be that interference from Kirk and the gang has caused the race to employ galactic travel too early in its development? Has the Prime Directive been broken? Is the rapid development of the Syhaar race the fault of the Federation, and will this new race survive the acceleration?

BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK
OF GENRE FICTION
BY KATE FATHERS



Life imitating art is standard when it comes to science fiction...

If you really think about it, sci-fi has given us everything: mobile phones, tablets, and the still-fledgling transporter; submarines, Skype, and the Google Self-Driving Car. Whatever writers dreamt of, ingenious people made, and in the mid-twentieth century writers like Aldous Huxley and Ira Levin were thinking of cloning. They explored its benefits and its dangers, and alongside them was Kate Wilhelm and her novel *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*. Dolly the sheep wouldn't have been born without her.

First published in 1976, Wilhelm's novel starts out like many sci-fi novels: with the apocalypse. With disease wiping out humanity and fewer babies being born, a small community in Virginia decides that cloning is the only way to save themselves. But the new clones are so different from their human donors, so secretive and set-apart. As decades pass, and the shape of the community changes, the threat shifts from the outside world to Virginia, and the humanity the clones may have lost.

It may not be fair to start out

with a criticism, but I'm going to: I wish this book had been longer. The story spans decades and multiple perspectives, and it could have easily been a Tolstoy-sized epic. Instead, it's a tidy 211 pages (in the hardback first edition), and while that does mean that the story isn't bogged down by world building, it's at the expense of the intimacy the reader can have with the characters. Wilhelm creates people you quickly connect to, and you want that connection to be deep. When they start to struggle, you want to see it. When they form relationships, hatch plans, and grow, you want every detail. No time jumps. No quick summaries. It's disappointing that we miss out on all those moments, and that we're denied the chance to truly know such great characters. It's the single misstep in an otherwise wonderful novel.

Because it is wonderful. Wilhelm's book may be about cloning, but the heart of the story is humanity. From the onset there is something absent in the clones, natural-born traits that they lack, and we discover that what's absent is ultimately what makes us human. All of this is wrapped up in the idea of the individual - the solitary human. Each clone is connected to their sibling clones, their identity tied to the group rather than to a sense of individualism, and anything that negatively affects the group is considered a threat. The ultimate threat is 'the cult of the individual', the very human ability to look inward, to imagine, and take joy in solitude. Consequently, clones developing a sense of self and breaking away from their siblings (an act that literally causes pain) is discouraged. All individuals - all threats - are either exiled or killed. On the face of it, the clones' intimate connection sounds very heady, but the novel says that your connection to yourself is ultimately more important. When you are alone

with yourself, looking in, you can reflect, and from reflection springs creativity and innovation - and the dogged will to survive. When you're alone, every connection you make is hard-won and beautiful; every person you love is more precious. I find it fascinating that the most frustrating parts of being human (our isolation, our difficulty connecting to others, our difficulty understanding ourselves) are what Wilhelm celebrates, and what she says are our greatest strengths. Human beings, she says, are beautiful, unique, and screwed up, and it's why we're wonderful. It's why we've come this far. Because the absence of those things is what causes the clones' downfall.

Tied to that downfall is another consideration: nature vs. nurture. It's not an uncommon topic in cloning narratives, and it's something that weighed on my mind even though Wilhelm doesn't devote a lot of time to it. When the first clones are born, their genetic donors don't treat them like children. Some are discomfited, while others are openly hostile. While there are innate differences between the humans and the clones, I wonder how much of the clones' disdain of the individual is genetic. Was their value of the group inevitable? Or did the original humans bring that on themselves? Personally, I think treating the clones like people *could* have made a difference; everyone, even little clone kids, deserves respect.

There is so much to think about with *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*, both in regards to the future of cloning and to our present humanity. Like all good sci-fi writers, Kate Wilhelm makes us question the paths our technology may be taking, as well as our reaction to our own creation. Wilhelm won a Hugo and Locus award for her fantastic novel, and I think it deserves a place on every shelf.

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THE ELECTRIC

By Andrew David Barker

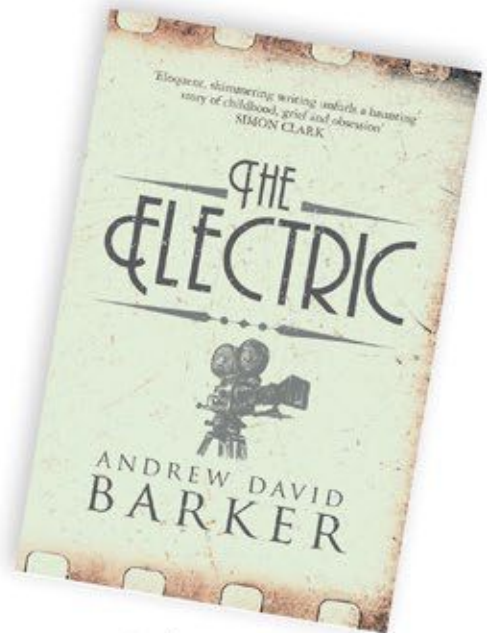
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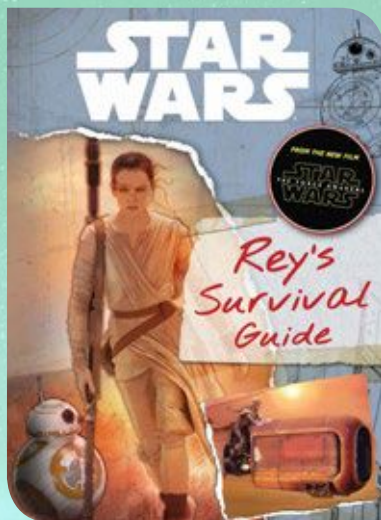
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REVIEWS

THE LATEST RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



**STAR WARS:
REY'S SURVIVAL GUIDE**
AUTHOR: JASON FRY / PUBLISHER: STUDIO FUN
INTERNATIONAL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Star Wars has seen a major resurgence in its lore books over the past few years. With the success of Daniel Wallace's books on the Sith, Empire, Bounty Hunter's Guild and

Jedi, it was only natural that we would see something tying into the new generation. With the new forces of the First Order and Resistance introduced and so many new worlds to explore, Rey's Survival Guide had a ready-made audience awaiting new stories. Unfortunately, this probably isn't the book fans were hoping for, and it's baffling an author as talented as Jason Fry didn't produce something truly stellar here.

Written as an in-universe work, the Survival Guide has been pieced together by Rey (AKA the Luke Skywalker successor of the new trilogy) as she struggled to make a living on Jakku. It records her past experiences on a world littered with the hardware of long dead armies, offering insight into both. The problem is that, unlike its predecessors, the book only starts to touch on these elements rather than truly delve into them.

We sadly learn very little about Rey herself save for one or two charming bits about her childhood, and despite its unique environment, Jakku itself seems unremarkable. We learn little of the vehicles (save for which bits make profitable sales) or inner workings of any society, and that's largely thanks to Rey herself. It tries to keep things toned down, to focus upon how she understandably either doesn't know or

doesn't have the time to fully cover these, but that just makes for an extremely shallow experience. It leaves the book relying upon the reader's investment in Rey, but there's little personality or real flourish to her writing style. This could have easily been overcome by having her inherit the guide from prior owners, but the only push for more flavourful text comes in the form of a few fliers. These moments are where the book really shines as it gives something for the writing to truly work with, but they're few and far between.

Perhaps the biggest casualty here is the artwork, as the book tries to emulate the sketches of an everyday person. Understandable, but it means it pales in comparison to the glorious illustrations of The Jedi Path and others, and it's often visually dull at best.

While Rey's Survival Guide isn't bad, it's bland and fairly unremarkable, which is a problem when it's following several smash hits like Book of Sith. If you truly want to see more of The Force Awakens, it's not a bad option, but you would do better to look into the author's vastly better works like The Essential Guide to Warfare.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★ 4



THE VANISHING THRONE
AUTHOR: ELIZABETH MAY / PUBLISHER:
GOLLANCZ / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Following on from the Are-you-@#*%ing-kidding-me? cliffhanger ending of The Falconer, which made all those completing it demand to know where the hell the rest

of the pages were, The Vanishing Throne picks up pretty much directly where its predecessor left off. Upon escaping from the imprisonment of sadistic faery warlord Lonnrach, our heroine Lady Aileana Kameron returns to a world lain to waste by the Wild Hunt as the faeries ransack all of human civilisation in search of the one thing that can save their dying realm.

As the middle instalment of a trilogy, The Vanishing Throne has the unenviable responsibility of continuing and expanding the original story while also being a complete tale in its own right and not just a 350-page expository infodump. Thankfully, the plot quickly veers sharply away from the 'lone hero saves the world' fantasy archetype that The Falconer played up right to its dying moments, instead crafting a richer, deeper and darker tale. The principal characters, both heroic and villainous, are given far greater development, each revealing themselves to be neither wholly virtuous nor utterly immoral, but like all people lie somewhere in between the two extremes as they do all that they believe they must to defend those they care about.

As the hidden truths of faery history are revealed, Aileana becomes the key figure in a centuries-old power play, with events

hanging on her death or continued survival. Her previous concerns, the presumption imparted by her nobility to marry well and remain respectable while keeping hidden her nocturnal faery-hunting exploits lest she be considered unladylike, have all now been rendered moot by war. However, she still feels the weight of responsibility to represent all past Falconers, the line of warrior women to which she is the sole remaining heir, and stand against the tsunami of devastation that threatens to annihilate the entire planet.

Figures on both sides experience the pull of forces such as tradition, duty, responsibility and destiny, while also feeling the desire to escape such expectations fostered upon them by nothing more than the accident of birth, as the lines between good and evil become further blurred as the plot develops. Although the story is yet to be finished at the book's conclusion, the ending is far more of a natural stopping point than last time, and sets things up nicely for the trilogy's final chapter where the ultimate fate of two worlds will be decided.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★★★ 8



THE PRISON IN ANTARES

AUTHOR: MIKE RESNICK
PUBLISHER: PROMETHEUS BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Sometimes sequels can surprise you. A poor first book or movie can be rescued by an excellent sequel, one that smooths away the flaws of the previous work and brings the finer points into gleaming focus. The Prison in Antares is the sequel to the lacklustre pulp sci-fi adventure novel The Fortress in Orion, and though it's certainly an improvement, it doesn't quite make the grade.

Mike Resnick is an old hand at quality pulp sci-fi. He's written everything from profound examinations into the nature of humanity and technology to flat-out operatic space war with bold heroes and two-dimensional villains. The Prison in Antares is certainly intended to be on the latter side of this spectrum; it's a ripping yarn about Nathan

Pretorious and a team of mean space mercenaries (called the Dead Enders) who are charged with rescuing a top scientist from a high security space prison. It's a pulpy, page-turning action adventure affair.

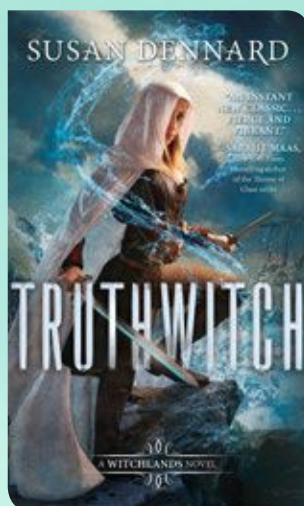
The problem is that, because Resnick is such a broad and well-known talent, it's hard not to hold his current work up to a higher standard. You turn each page hoping for something more. A smidge of characterisation, maybe, or a plot twist that you can't see a light-year or two away. What should be a lot of fun turns into tedium; rather than stimulating action we get a list of old clichés. The horrible thing about The Prison in Antares is that it reads like a fan attempt at some classic sci-fi fun, only instead of it being the product

of some clumsy amateur, this is actually Mike Resnick impersonating a younger, more promising version of himself.

Pulp sci-fi can be many things and work on many levels. It simply isn't enough to have cool technology and cooler male power fantasies. These days, we want all that and to also care about the characters, see their flaws and explore their world. Resnick's current series seems stuck in a past era of science fiction that never really existed; lazy, two-dimensional storytelling with predictable plots. We can only hope that the next book in this series redeems it all, but somehow we doubt it.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★☆☆☆☆ 5



TRUTHWITCH

AUTHOR: SUSAN DENNARD
PUBLISHER: TOR BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

There is a growing subgenre of Young Adult fantasy fiction that runs across fairly specific lines. Broadly, we meet a young female protagonist who lives in a world where magic is a thing, but not necessarily a good thing. Then it turns out that this young woman has a unique and different magic power that not only marks her out as different and dangerous, but also means that her personal relationships are spectacularly complex.

Truth Witch follows along this well established line of storytelling. The Witchlands are a place that enjoys a fragile peace. The thing that's keeping everything from descending into war are the various witches. Most witches have one specific talent (more of a super-power than magic) and these include controlling

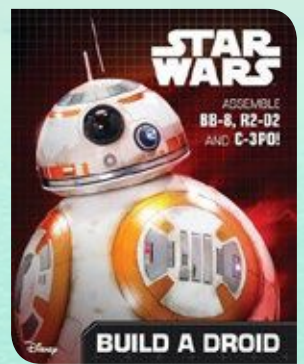
the wind, sending messages long distance, being hard to kill and so on. The rarer your power, the more valuable you are. The main character, Safiya, is a Truthwitch. In short, she knows if you're lying. Her best friend, Iseult, is a Threadwitch; she can see the complex bonds of fate and consequence between people. Given that they are both teenage girls with a distinctive edge when it comes to social interaction, wackiness ensues. Unfortunately for the pair, more than a few people would like to control a Truthwitch, and as the fragile peace begins to crack, the duo find that they have to work very hard to keep their freedom.

Despite its formulaic trappings, Truthwitch is a steady and highly engaging read. Of course, we know that

the main character is going to fall for some powerful young man, and yes, at some point we expect one of the lead characters special abilities to be more trouble than it's worth. The fact that we know these beats are coming doesn't make it any less of an enjoyable experience. Dennard breathes life into her protagonists, and it's the relationships between these heroes that keep us turning the page. The dialogue is strong, clever and sweet and though the world is nothing special, we care so much about the characters that we want to know more. Truthwitch is as good as it gets, and well worth a look.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★☆☆☆☆ 7



STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS ACTIVITY BOOKS

PUBLISHER: EGMONT
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Do you hate your children? Are you currently looking for presents for them, even though Christmas has been and gone? You could do a lot worse than Egmont's Star Wars offerings: the Poster Activity Book, Colouring Book and the papercraft Build a Droid book.

All three are cheap (nothing more than a tenner), inoffensive, and likely to keep your child quiet on a rainy day. We certainly remember this tactic working on us when we were children. It's also a good way to get children on board with the new characters if they weren't already. The Poster Activity Book combines removable posters with word searches, maze puzzles and even a simplified

form of Sudoku. Y'know, traditional puzzles. As for the colouring book... well, there's not much to say about the colouring book. It's a book. With Star Wars drawings. That you colour in. (Three years at the Academy for Arts Reviewers for this?)

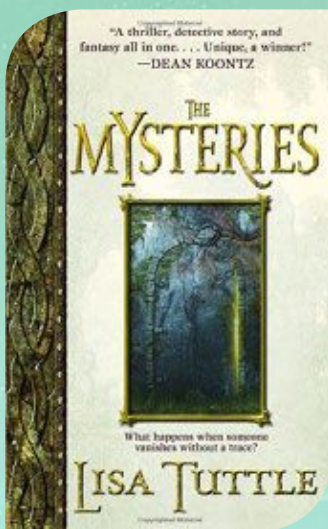
The most interesting product here is the Build a Droid book. It's designed to get youngsters thinking all crafty in an effort to build one or all of C-3PO, R2-D2 and BB-8 out of thickened card, making use of instructions. The instructions are very bare bones, so be prepared to actually get involved when your children are making these. Best let them do the actual assembly though

as it requires small hands and might be a bit too fiddly for adults. It was certainly too fiddly for us - we gave up after another sodding tab snapped off R2's stupid cylinder body. At least the resulting head is small enough to chuck out of the window in frustration.

It is, if nothing else, a decent selection of products. None of these would be a beloved present handed down for generations, but then nobody was expecting them to be. Great to keep your kids quiet, or to give to a nephew you are ambivalent about.

SCOTT VARNHAM

★★★★★☆☆☆☆ 7



THE MYSTERIES

AUTHOR: LISA TUTTLE / PUBLISHER: JO FLETCHER BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

U.S. private investigator Ian Kennedy specialises in finding missing persons, an obsession that began back in childhood when his father disappeared. When the book begins, Ian is living in London. His professional life is haphazard; his personal life is a mess. Ian is finally about to throw in the towel and fly back to Texas, but then a desperate woman approaches him with a case he cannot refuse.

Peri Lensky disappeared two years ago. The police labelled her a runaway and closed the investigation almost as soon as it

had begun. But Laura Lensky, Peri's mother, believes the true facts are a lot more sinister.

It is only when Ian reads the missing girl's diary and interviews her former boyfriend that he uncovers disturbing parallels between this case and one of his earlier investigations, when he was hired to track down another young woman only to discover she had been abducted by the faeries. But these aren't the friendly Tinkerbell-like faeries from children's books, these are the fae – cruel, selfish entities with the power to seduce mortals and imprison them inside the Otherworld. Peri's ex-boyfriend believes in the fae because he can see them; he knows Peri was abducted by a fairy king – one of the Sidhe, a race of sprites from Celtic folklore – but it is only Ian who understands how to break the faerie-spell and bring Peri back, and even he may not be strong enough to do that. The magic of the faeries isn't easily resisted.

The Mysteries is a conundrum. Lisa Tuttle is a fantastic writer and her ability to juggle convincing private eye-noir with the more nebulous genres of myth and fantasy is what really makes this book something special. Let's face it, for most of us fairies are a couple of inches high with pointy ears trailing glittery dust behind them, so how big a menace can they actually be? But Tuttle makes them a viable supernatural opponent, which is quite a trick when you think about it.

How does she do that? Well, Tuttle has the uncanny knack of making us believe that the faerie world is possible, and she partially accomplishes this by interweaving unrelated stories and folk legends about faeries in-between the chapters of the main novel.

It's an interesting approach and it certainly gives more depth to the subject, but some of these side-journeys are several pages in length, which can be quite distracting. More problematic than that, one or two of them are more compelling than the novel itself, and it is quite disappointing when those segments end and the 'proper story' resumes.

Another issue we had with The Mysteries is that, although it is essentially quite a simple narrative, Tuttle throws in a lot of unnecessary sub-plots (some of which never feel properly resolved) and she jumps around in time and point-of-view far too often, cherry-picking past moments from her character's lives that ultimately don't add very much to the main story. Just like the anecdotes-between-chapters, all this extra information really accomplishes is cluttering up a plot that already requires some patience from the reader.

On that note, anyone who is familiar with the legend of 'Tam Lin' will either find a lot to enjoy here or a lot to get frustrated about. In many ways, this is a modern retelling of that story with a Sam Spade-twist (and, for the record, if you like 'Tam Lin' check out the little-known 1970 movie directed by Roddy McDowall).

For all those reasons, The Mysteries is a disappointing read. There's a lot to admire here – especially if you like your folklore spiced up with a little detective fiction – but the execution is lacking, the ending feels anticlimactic and the storytelling goes off-road far too often for its own good.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★★★☆☆ 6



70s MONSTER MEMORIES

EDITOR: ERIC MCNAUGHTON / PUBLISHER: BUZZY KROTECK PRODUCTIONS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Many books have been written on the seventies as horror's golden age; few convey as well as this one does what it was actually like to grow up as a horror movie fan in that era, a time before DVD, digital downloads and Netflix, when actually getting to see horror films was often quite difficult, as they were

usually limited to a few late night showings on TV (back when there were only three channels) or occasional repertory screenings at the local Odeon (usually on a Sunday afternoon). Often deprived of the actual movies themselves, seventies Monster Kids (like this reviewer) indulged their passion in reading about horror films instead: magazines like House of Hammer and Famous Monsters kept the flame burning, as did horror film picture books by such luminaries as Denis Gifford and Alan Frank. The Monster Kids worshipped at the shrine of the Aurora model kit, and swapped trading cards and comics, and pored over movie tie-in novels; anything to get their fix in the long, agonising wait between movies.

Eric (We Belong Dead) McNaughton's 70s Monster Memories captures the whole experience in a mammoth 400 pages covering every aspect of what it was to be a horror fan back then. With over seventy contributors writing on a diversity of horror peripherals from BBC Death and Horror Sound Effects LPs, to Geoff Love and his Orchestra soundtracks, to poster magazines, creature feature cards, Scooby Doo, and Dracula Lives!, this makes for a fascinating look at the many faces of horror fandom.

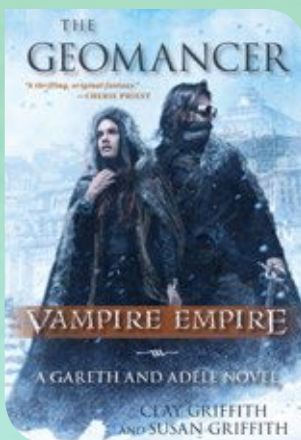
Although aimed squarely at those who partook in those times (for whom the sight of Horror Top Trumps and Wall's Dracula's Secret ice lollies is guaranteed to stir up

more than a few childhood memories), there is plenty here for horror fans of all ages. The articles are well researched and informative. Many (such as Tony Earnshaw's interview with Dez Skinn about the story of House of Hammer magazine) take us behind the scenes of legendary TV shows, comics and fanzines. There's stuff on British and American television horror and much more besides.

More than a just nostalgia fest, then, '70s Monster Memories records a very special era in horror fandom, one which ultimately gave rise to the horror community that we know today. "What amazes me from talking to others over the years is the shared experiences," McNaughton writes in his introduction. "We thought we were the only ones, but there were hundreds, if not thousands, of us across the globe, all experiencing the same thing, being influenced by the same books and magazines." It is exactly this sense of shared experience that 70s Monster Memories captures so vividly, making the book not just a hugely enjoyable document of 70s horror ephemera, but a testament to horror fandom in all its multifaceted glory.

JON TOWLSON

★★★★★★★★★★★☆☆ 9



THE GEOMANCER

AUTHOR: CLAY & SUSAN GRIFFITH
PUBLISHER: PYR
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Geomancer is a marketed as "the first Gareth and Adele novel", and is actually a continuation of Clay Griffith's Vampire Empire series. This means that newcomers to the world of Vampire Empire are in for a tough ride. This is not really a jumping on point, despite what it may say on the back of the book.

The Vampire Empire books are set in a fantasy and steampunk style world. The setting itself is approximately the modern day, but human development has stagnated thanks to the proliferation of vampire clans. Humanity has zeppelins, clever clockwork widgets and the usual trappings of a steampunk setting. As the novel begins,

the bloodsuckers have been driven out of England, thanks in part to Adele, the titular Geomancer who can use her magical powers to blow up vampires. Of course, her friend and lover Gareth is a Vampire prince, but one on the side of the angels. Or something.

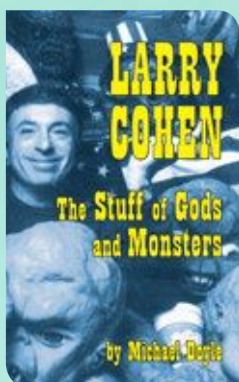
With their very existence at stake, the vampire forces have begun to plot and plan ways to topple Adele and her consort, recruiting those who can foil magic. As humanity starts to find freedom, the ancient enemy begins to find a way back to the top of food chain, and it's up to the powerful Adele and her pet monster to stop them.

The main problem with all this is that a lot of it makes very little sense if you haven't

read the previous books. Our emotional investment in the pair of them pretty much depends on us having cared about them previously. Add to this clunky dialogue and poorly realised relationships and the whole thing is a bit dull. The vampires are villainous and unlikeable, of course, but that's what they're for. Without any grounding in the world, everything feels forced and mechanical. Those looking for some pleasing steampunk fantasy with vampires and a modern day twist may want to consider checking out Kim Newman's work instead.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆ 5



LARRY COHEN: THE STUFF OF GODS AND MONSTERS

AUTHOR: MICHAEL DOYLE
PUBLISHER: BEAR MANOR MEDIA
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

understatement. The writer/director/producer has made over twenty films, including such cult classics as the It's Alive trilogy, God Told Me To, The Stuff, Q - The Winged Serpent, Special Effects, A Return to Salem's Lot and The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover. As a screenwriter, he is even more prolific – eighty-four screenplays to his credit, including Phone Booth, the Maniac Cop trilogy, and Abel Ferrara's Bodysnatchers to name but three. And then there are his many TV scripts. Anyone remember The Invaders starring Roy Thinnes? Cohen created it. NYPD Blue? Cohen's written it. Film critic Robin Wood championed Cohen in the late 1970s, but since then only one full-length study has been devoted to his work. But fear not, because Michael Doyle's Larry Cohen: The Stuff of Gods and Monsters more than makes up for this neglect: his new volume

of interviews with the filmmaker is nothing less than exhaustive in its coverage of Cohen's fifty-year career.

Conducted over a period of three years, this book covers everything from Cohen's early days in television, to his directing credits on '70s Blaxploitation classics Black Caesar and Hell up in Harlem, to the making of his breakout hit It's Alive, to forging his career as an independent making films for AIP and New World in the '70s, '80s and '90s. The straight-talking Cohen is a terrific interviewee and Doyle knows exactly what questions to ask him. Pretty much everything you wanted to know about Larry Cohen can be found within this book's bumper 700 pages, including his thoughts on the social-political interpretations that critics have given of his work. It's a barnstorming debut from Rue Morgue writer

Michael Doyle, and beautifully put together by Bear Manor Media, complete with many rare photographs from Larry Cohen's own private files.

Enjoyable and informative throughout, Cohen has fascinating anecdotes about his collaborations with the likes of Hitchcock, Bernard Herrmann, Sam Fuller and Bette Davis, about working with Bill Lustig on the Maniac Cop series, about his involvement in the Masters of Horror series, and much more besides. Comprehensively researched and written, with none of the usual repetition you often find in interview collections of this sort, this is compulsive reading from start to finish and an indispensable volume for cult movie fans.

JON TOWLSON

★★★★★★★★★★★★ 10



THE LAST WAR

AUTHOR: ALEX DAVIS
PUBLISHER: TICKETY BOO PRESS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Sometimes, the purpose of science fiction is to provide a full on, action-fuelled romp that will take the reader on an impossible journey. Other times, its purpose is to hold up a mirror to the real world by using strange ideas and elaborate metaphors to make the reader think. Alex Davis' The Last War is firmly in the latter category, and this makes it a leisurely yet engaging read.

The central plot is one that feels more like a parable than a science fiction story. Davis introduces us to an alien race called the Noukari. They are an intelligent, rational species who are a very much still a developing culture. Every resource they have is precious and any project

they undertake can have far reaching implications for their continued survival. They also have some level of telepathic power, though as a developing culture, they've yet to codify or fully realise their abilities.

Some of the Noukari believe that their far and distant creators, a race called the Apex, are gods and should be worshipped. Others maintain that this is an enormous waste of precious time and energy, especially as it is impossible to prove if the Apex exist. Over time, the two groups grow apart and, of course, blame each other when things go wrong. What begins with mutual suspicion and energetic debate ends in

something far darker and far too familiar to anyone who has ever picked up a newspaper.

The Last War is slow, character-driven fiction which features heroes that are mostly defined by their relationships with other characters as well as their conflicting opinions. None of the protagonists are particularly sympathetic, but the story itself is intriguing. Davis writes in a relaxed and gentle style, taking the time to slowly expand on his story and draw the reader in. Engaging stuff and worth your time.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★★★★ 7



INTERVIEW - SAM STONE

An award-winning Manchester-born Gothic, horror and fantasy writer, SAM STONE also happens to be the commissioning editor of Telos Publishing imprint Telos Moonrise. A popular character on the UK book scene, we caught up to discuss her work...

STARBURST: What are you working on at the moment?

Sam Stone: I'm working on my sixth *Vampire Gene* novel. It's the first time I've revisited my vampires since 2012. The readers have been asking for it and I've given in!

What made you start these stories of vampires?

I wrote the first book, *Killing Kiss*, as my master's degree dissertation. I've always been a huge fan of the genre myself. I've read a lot of Anne Rice, Stephen King, and Bram Stoker. So, for me, it was a natural thing to write a vampire novel. After that, I just thought the characters were great and I didn't want to leave them alone. I continued and it became a series.

And why do you think we're drawn to horror in fiction?

I think the fundamental appeal of horror is that humans like to be scared. I think horror novels and movies, particularly supernatural horror, are something we can enjoy safely and feel that little bit of fear. We can enjoy the fear that it creates without feeling under threat. I don't enjoy the Richard Laymon type of horror, which is a bit more realistic. Books like *Endless Night* where you can imagine those serial killers really being out there doing horrible things I think human monsters are much worse than fictional monsters.

You tend to do a lot of conventions these days. What is the appeal?

Writing can be a solitary business. Going out and meeting people at conventions is a really nice thing for authors because you get to meet the people who are reading your work. It's a little bit of reinforcement. I also think it's nice to meet people who haven't heard of you and reinforce your readership and get your name out there. It's essential for authors to do that.

Has the nature of publishing changed over the years?

I think the Internet has changed the game considerably for independents, especially the small and micro press. You don't have to have a massive amount of money behind you in order to publish good standard books. Print on Demand is particularly one of those ways where you can produce a physical copy of a paperback. All of the e-book platforms haven't so much levelled the playing field, but they've been a new outlet for medium-sized publishers such as Telos. I think, initially, we weren't sure a digital press was going to be a good idea, but it's turned out to be very useful tool.

How important is Fan Fiction to the future of writing? Is it a new thing?

It's interesting you mention fan fiction as I was recently on a panel about that at the Long Island Who convention. I think writers have always done fan fiction. I was writing fan fiction as a teenager, but we didn't call it that. The only difference now is that we've got the World Wide Web, so there's a wider audience.

Who are your favourite authors?

That's a difficult one. I'm an ardent fan of Tanith Lee, Adam Nevill, and Freda Warrington. In terms of steampunk, Jonathan Green. I like comedic and fantasy fiction, mostly anything that's unlike that I write now!

What's next on your agenda?

I've got several projects lined up. I've been asked to do a Sherlock Holmes story for Titan, with George Mann as editor. I'm hoping to write more for Big Finish; I did an audio for their Dorian Gray range, so I'm hoping to write a bit more of that. I'm also writing the third book in the Jinx Chronicles. The second book is written, we're waiting for a cover from the artist Jim Burns. After that, I'm looking at writing something new and original. I have a few ideas brewing. Of course there'll be a new Kat Lightfoot steampunk adventures.

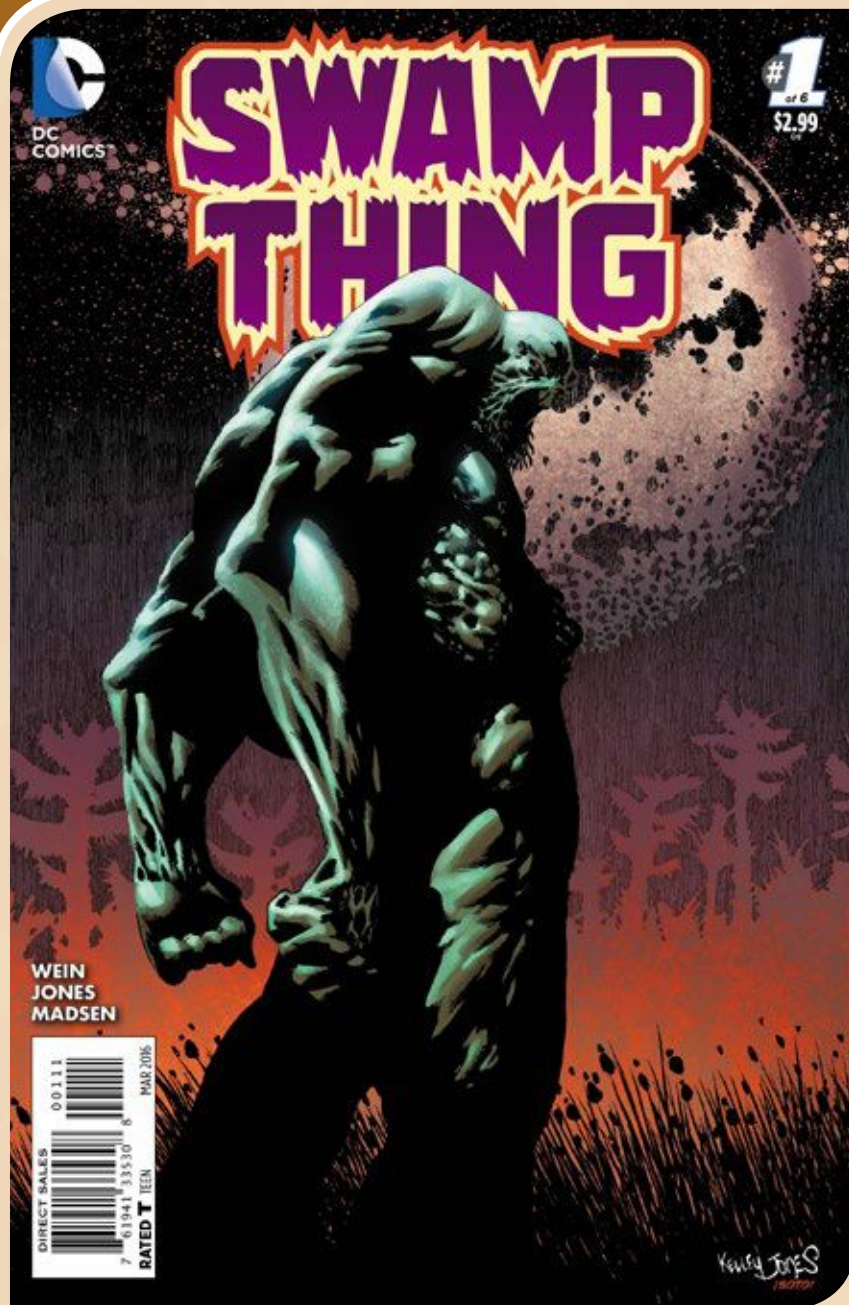
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You can find more about SAM STONE and her work via sam-stone.blogspot.co.uk



JOEL HARLEY PULLS
MONITOR DUTY
TO BRING YOU
THE LATEST FROM
THE WORLD OF
COMICBOOKS

VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER



a gorgeous 2000 AD mega epics collection (which I'm still collecting today), the return of Neil Gaiman to *The Sandman*, and Archie Andrews royally pissing me off by meeting *Sharknado*, *Predator* or *Judge Dredd* every month. So moving onwards and upwards, we delve right in. Let news commence!

This month sees the return of (co-) creator Len Wein to *Swamp Thing* in the aptly titled *Swamp Thing Returns*. Accompanied by Kelley Jones on art duties, the story will see Swampy under attack from certain dark forces (no change there, then), while alter ego Alec Holland has issues of his own to contend with that may or may not be related.

There must be something in the water: *The Walking Dead* (you might have heard of it) co-creator Tony Moore is set to return for issue #150. While Charlie Adlard will keep illustrating the book, Moore is to celebrate the milestone with his very own cover, depicting the shaven-headed, bearded, hook-handed man Rick Grimes has become in Moore's absence. "Words cannot describe how excited I am to have Tony Moore, artist of the first 6 issues, returning to provide a cover for this special event," (other) (co-) creator Robert Kirkman said, all water presumably being under the bridge since that one time in 2012 that Moore tried to sue Kirkman over unpaid profits from the television series (you might have heard of that too). Jason Latour and Ryan Ottley will also be doing variant covers for *The Walking Dead* #150, which will be out by the time you read this.

Talking of creators doing things with their creations, the legendary Mike Mignola has decided that it is time to bring *Hellboy in Hell* to its end with Issue Ten – more prematurely than we had expected. Furthermore, the creator will be taking a year off from drawing. Well, we can't blame the guy. See you next year, Mike!

Two very popular things: Gwen Stacy and Deadpool. Or, more specifically, Spider-Gwen, the alternate universe Gwen Stacy in which she becomes Spidey. The two will (sort of) meet in *Gwenpool*, a mash-up of one of these things with the other. Although that wouldn't make sense, so the Gwen of *Gwenpool* isn't actually Gwen Stacy but new character Gwen Poole. Inspired by a variant cover and the subsequent cosplay of that, the not-at-all-motivated-by-money adventures of *The Unbelievable Gwenpool* will debut in April. At least they can't get Ryan Reynolds to play this one.

With a little thing called *Civil War* on the horizon (you may have heard of it), what's old shall once again become new, with Marvel working on *Civil War II*, headlined by Brian Michael Bendis and David Marquez.

2 016 time! And with it, our first batch of comic book news for the New Year. With a new year comes the usual resolutions (stop reporting on *Dark Knight III* variant covers!), reconciliations (see the *Walking Dead* news, a few paragraphs below), returns and, inevitably, failed resolutions (hey, there

are a lot of *Dark Knight III* variant covers and I love and want them all).

2015 was a good year for comics, giving me plenty to report upon and lots to look forward to in 2016. We had the return of Frank Miller (sorry), the return(ing) of the Old DC, there was an All New, All Different Marvel,



Further details are scant, although one can expect a lot of reluctant punching and battling ideologies, presumably to be released at around the same time as *Captain America: Civil War*. Confusingly, that gets its own tie-in too, in *Marvel's Captain America: Civil War Prelude #1*, the first in a four part series which should give us a little more context to Cap and Tony's forthcoming fight.

Meanwhile, DC will similarly cash in on their forthcoming superhero showdown *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* with a number of variant issues released with March's comics. Although none of these are said to bear the *Dawn of Justice* moniker (because it's stupid), you can expect to see an influx of books featuring Batman and Superman on the cover, most likely with one (usually Batman) trying to cave the other's head in. More than usual, that is.

Mike Allred draws Judge Dredd! 2000 AD has always done well in getting top talent to draw some of its number one names (well, most of them *did* start out working for the comic in the first place), but they've bagged a doozy in Mike Allred (I may be biased, the *Madman* creator being one of my all-time favourites) who depicts Dredd, Anderson, Johnny Alpha, Rogue Trooper and a handful of others for the cover of their Free Comic Book Day issue. What, all that and for free, too? Zarjaz indeed!

No reconciliation, but a return, of sorts nevertheless: Number Nine, we barely knew ye. The briefest of Nu-Who's Doctors, Christopher Eccleston's Nine is set to get his own ongoing series, brought to us by the BBC and Titan Comics. Rose and Captain Jack will join the Doctor in his TARDIS, while the ongoing should also bring us other faces old and new from the RTD era and beyond (plus,

presumably, before). *Doctor Who: The Ninth Doctor* will be written by Cavan Scott and illustrated by Adriana Melo. You can start reading in April, if you like.

All that, and not a broken resolution in sight, with me managing to get through the whole thing without bringing up Greg Capullo's really good variant cover artwork for *The Dark Knight III*. Oh. Dammit. Well, there's always next year. And, on that note of gloomy inevitability, so we wrap up our first round-up of the year. As ever, I can be contacted via the usual Twitter and e-mail handles, where we can all commiserate our broken new year's resolutions together, and also share little good *The Dark Knight III* variant art. Oops.

Joel Harley can be contacted at:
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 and tweeted @joelharley



ELSIE HARRIS PICTURE PALACE



JESSICA MARTIN

INTERVIEW - JESSICA MARTIN

When we found out that Jessica Martin, multi-talented star of stage and screen and (most notably for **STARBURST** readers) the actress who played Mags the werewolf-girl in the Sylvester McCoy-era **DOCTOR WHO** story **THE GREATEST SHOW IN THE GALAXY**, had released her first graphic novel **ELSIE HARRIS PICTURE PALACE** to rave reviews, we had to find out more. Jessica very kindly took some time out of her busy schedule appearing in the West End production of **ELF** to spill some secrets...

STARBURST: How long have you been drawing? And where did your fascination with 1930s cinema come from?

Jessica Martin: They actually both pretty much started at the same time! When I was at school, I loved drawing. I was always drawing pictures of film stars and making up my own versions of MGM movies inside my head even when I was very young. My earliest memory of being into films is when I was aged six and there was a documentary about Greta Garbo on television. Joan Crawford narrated it. And I remember seeing this amazing, beautiful woman dressed up as Queen Christina, talking with this slight foreign accent, and that was it! I wanted to know all about her and I wanted to know all about the movies of that particular time. My mother bought me a book for Christmas called *A Pictorial History of the Talkies* by Daniel Blum, which was a history of films from 1928 to 1968, and it basically became my *Grimms' Fairy Tales*! It was this fantastic encyclopaedia with these tiny little pictures in it.

For me, drawing was a way of prolonging an experience. Everything in our life is so ephemeral and transitory, and why I'm attracted to drawing and times gone by is because I just want everything to last a little longer. When I was at school, I did A-level art and that was my best subject. But I always wanted to be an actor. My father was a jazz pianist and I used to sing with him occasionally and even though I loved art, it always seemed a bit nebulous and not really a career option, so around about the age of 21, I sort of stopped drawing completely. Up until then I used to have a sketch book with me all the time.

So what got you back into it?

It was Father's Day 2010, and we went to the Tate Modern. I remember being really disappointed because I didn't get what was going on with the art. I wanted to see the narrative art which belongs either in the Tate Britain or the National Gallery, the kind of art that when you see it you can immediately dream up a scenario, a movie, just from looking at that picture. That's the art that makes me feel something. And I got a sketch book that same day. That was the beginning.

For some years, probably since I'd settled down and got married and had children, I'd always been looking for something besides acting to hang my creative thirst onto. And returning to drawing seemed to sate all these creative needs that had been running around inside me, looking for a home. I'd sit and draw a couple of houses as I was waiting to pick up the kids on the school run or I'd go for a coffee and find myself drawing the coffee cup. And then I got a job playing the Lady of the Lake in the national tour of *Spamalot* and Phill Jupitus, who was playing King Arthur, is a massive comics fan. I showed him my sketches and he just sort of looked at me and said matter-of-factly 'You can draw and you can write scripts. You ought to be writing a graphic novel'.

As a person I'm rather like my character Elsie. I'm faced with a challenge, rather than thinking 'Ooh, that's beyond me!' I

ELSIE HARRIS PICTURE PALACE



**A BEAUTIFUL
DREAMER**



Shortlisted for the Myriad First Graphic Novel Prize 2014, "Elsie Harris Picture Palace" follows the adventures of a young London girl working in the male dominated film industry of the 1930's.



**A DASHING
MOVIE STAR**



**A CHARMING
STRANGER**

foolishly think 'Yeah I can do that, how hard can it be?' so I took Phill's advice.

And did *Elsie* materialise straight away?

Elsie's inception came very quickly, but the first thing I did was I bought everything I could afford that was to do with comics and writing comics and I went on an online course with a guy in the States who was very encouraging. I knew I needed some skills under my belt and it isn't an easy process because creating a graphic novel isn't just about drawing a picture,

it's coming up with a script; it's directing it, there are so many elements. Most people in comics have been doing it since childhood and I'm coming to it quite late in the game.

But I also knew very quickly that the theme or the genre I was going to be involved in would be bringing the Golden Age of Hollywood to life.

The first thing I had published – or made public – was a little journal-type comic called *Wishful Inking* that is still on my website. From there the plans for

Elsie were hatched quickly. I'd written a full blown script within a few months and I'd started plotting out the pictures for it, but the *Elsie* that exists now is probably the third incarnation. I did twenty-five completed pages and I took them along to a family friend who acts almost like a personal trainer, he makes sure I reach deadlines. He encouraged me to go to my very first comic convention, and I had a blast. The next Comic Con I went to, I met somebody who became my mentor, my Obi Wan Kenobi – Mark Buckingham. Mark's an incredible artist, one of the VIPs in the mainstream comic world, he did *Miracle Man* with Neil Gaiman, and then the rest was history. He's taken time and effort to look at my artwork and critique it, he's let me share his table space at conventions, and he illustrated one of my short stories for a comic strip that was published in 2012 called *Passing Thoughts*. At that time, I also created a comic called *It Girl* about the silent film star Clara Bow, partially as a statement of intent, but also to see if there was an audience for my kind of work. To my delight, I went to one convention and sold sixty copies in a day, which is apparently unheard of! Then I started going and stocking up in comic shops and people began following my progress on Facebook. I was asked to enter a competition for a graphic novel prize and I revised and submitted my pages of *Elsie*. On the day I found out my entry had been shortlisted, I got a call from Matt West at Miwk Publishing, he's a massive *Doctor Who* fan and he was enthusiastic about the whole concept – Matt is into old films too. Miwk hadn't published a graphic novel





before, but because I've got the following from the theatre and *Doctor Who*, they took the risk on me.

How long did *Elsie* take to complete?

It was essentially a year, from May 2014 to May just gone. The process ended up taking longer than I anticipated. During that time I also did *Vivacity*, about Vivien Leigh, and I collaborated with Mark on a story for the quarterly anthology SFX, published by Vertigo. Each anthology is based on a sound effect and the story I worked on – *The Audition* – is in the current edition, which is called *Krak*. Mark wrote the story and did the layouts and I finished it, so I've done the inking and the fully finished pencils. Surprise, surprise, it's set in a 1930s film studio!

How did it feel to complete *Elsie*? Was it hard to (literally!) draw the line and finish working on her?

Yes, absolutely! The thing about art, for any artist, is that every piece of work you do, you improve. I love Norman Rockwell's art and all those quite realistic-looking golden age comics like *Flash Gordon* – Alex Raymond was wonderful. I got part of the way there with *Elsie*, but I'm not there yet and it's hard to stop when I know there are things I want to improve. I'm a very self-critical person and whenever you publish something you're saying to the world 'This

is me, this is my declaration and it's as good as I've got it!'

And if you had to choose between acting and art, which one would it be?

I love show business and I'm having so much fun appearing in *Elf*, but if I had to make a choice I would go for the graphic novel and the comic work. Showbiz is fantastic, but it's the circus. You're there and then the tent comes down and suddenly you're yesterday's news. For me, personally, now that I've found this thing I can do that is unique to me, it's like discovering the Philosopher's Stone! Any number of people can play a role in a show but when you create something original in art or writing it's only you who can do it.



Finally, could there be a *Doctor Who* graphic novel in your future?

I have got a Mags origin story up my sleeve as we speak. It's a whole story about Mags and the planet she grew up on and the reasons she had to leave that planet; if *STARBURST* readers would like to see it and I get a strong enough response, I'll put that firmly on the list for next year!

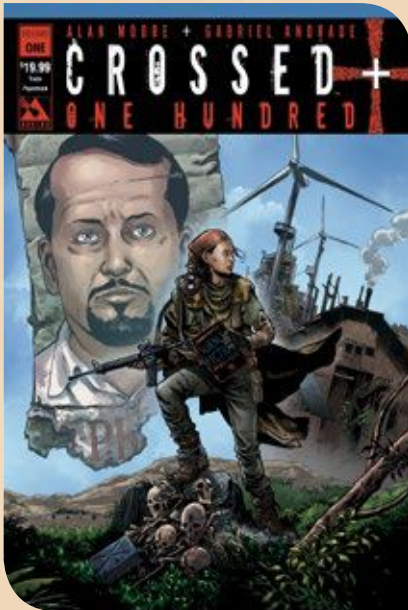
IAN WHITE

Find out more about Jessica, her fabulous debut graphic novel *Elsie Harris Picture Palace*, and all her other projects at her website: officialjessicamartin.com.



REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC
BOOK RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



CROSSED + ONE HUNDRED: VOLUME 1

WRITER: ALAN MOORE / ARTIST: GABRIEL
ANDRADE / PUBLISHER: AVATAR / RELEASE
DATE: OUT NOW

The world of *Crossed* is one in which a highly contagious disease sweeps across the Earth and, rather than turning everyone into zombies, turns them into violent, swears, psychotic killers who indulge in rape, cannibalism, murder and worse. The original series (invented by

Garth Ennis, who else?) was set in the modern day. *Crossed + One Hundred* is set in the future (in fact, one hundred years on from the outbreak of the plague) and is written by comic book creative legend Alan Moore.

The book begins with humanity just starting to make its way from under the ruins of its past. The *Crossed* virus is still around, but the surviving humans have been (mostly) able to outsmart the crazed killers; only nests of 'Ill-Billies', incest-weakened horrors who live in the mountains, remain. We follow the story of Future Taylor, an archivist who spends much of her time searching the ruins for useful books, DVDs and the like in order to help rebuild civilisation. During her journey, she uncovers creepy evidence that threatens to destroy everything mankind has worked for over the past hundred years. There's also a nice examination into our relationship with fiction; this is Alan Moore, after all.

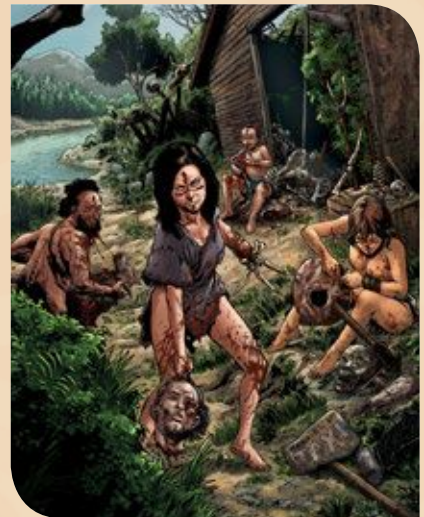
Those expecting a perhaps less gross and gory take on the *Crossed* world will be disappointed; Moore gleefully uses the premise for plenty of body horror. There's also quite a bit of nudity, some sex and a fair bit of violence throughout. Moore also has fun with the language here; *Crossed* tends to be filled with foul language and the conceit in *Crossed One Hundred* is that English has changed quite a bit. People don't "think", they "skull". They don't "look", they "opsy". Some swear words have lost all power and become regular verbs, and so on. This is nothing new for Moore; he's been playing fast and

loose with slang ever since *The Ballad of Halo Jones*. Though it adds a bit of a 'future savage' vibe to whole proceedings, it is also a bit of a hindrance at times.

Gabriel Andrade's art is pretty and evocative throughout. The artist turns even the worst atrocities into works of art and the entire thing is accessible, cinematic and very good. Or "movie", as they would say in *Crossed*'s future. Overall, this is an interesting read that will disturb regular comics readers and delight those into both *Crossed* and Alan Moore.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★ 8



FILMISH: A GRAPHIC JOURNEY THROUGH FILM

WRITER & ARTIST: EDWARD ROSS / PUBLISHER:
SELFMADEHERO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Edward Ross is an Edinburgh-based illustrator, cartoonist and occasional comic tutor with an obvious love for the history and inner workings of film. In his introduction, Ross makes his passion for the film industry plain: "As a teenager, I had stacks of VHS tapes that I rewatched endlessly - *Robocop*, 2001: A Space Odyssey, *Fargo*, *Pulp Fiction* and hundreds more. When the VHS recorder broke, I remember staying up till two in the morning watching *Dawn of the Dead* on TV, bleary-eyed and hypnotised by its slow-burning horror."

In this beautifully illustrated 200-page guide, Ross uses his artistic skills and extensive knowledge to take readers on a pleasure cruise through the history of cinema. From silent film classics such as *A Trip to the Moon* to *Metropolis* and early technicolour icons like *The Wizard of Oz*, to more modern day cult classics like

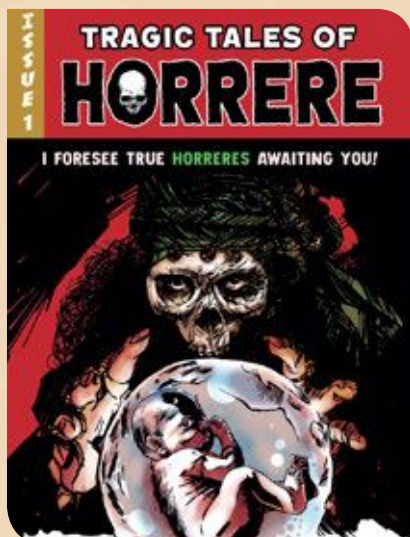
Alien and *Blade Runner*, everyone will enjoy finding their old favourites represented.

Ross uses comics to uncover the magic and mechanics behind some of cinema's most enduring films and spotlighting the directors that have created them, from early pioneers like Fritz Lang to today's innovators like Ridley Scott and James Cameron.

In all, three-hundred films are illustrated, with topics explored including everything from censorship to set design. While the text may become too preachy in parts for some readers, this does not take away from the overall enjoyment of this insightful and witty guide to stars and stories that have shaped film for over a hundred years.

RICHARD THOMAS

★★★★★★★★★ 8



TRAGIC TALES OF HORRERE ISSUE 1

WRITERS: ROB JONES, MICHAEL SAMBROOK
/ ARTISTS: ALISDAIR WOOD, GARETH SLEIGHTHOLME, NEIL FORD, ALASTAIR MCLAUCHLAN / PUBLISHER: MADIUS COMICS /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Tragic Tales of Horrere is an anthology series much like the classic Tales from the Crypt, created to shock and entertain whilst also showing off some great talent. Each short story is co-written by Rob Jones and Michael Sambrook, but

features a different artist. These talented writers and artists have created a must for the horror comic fan.

The series kicks off with *If You Go Down To The Woods Today...* a twist on the bigfoot/yeti mythos; who's the monster really? It plays with the idea of innocence in a really clever way. Neil Ford's art is very clean and stark, with very contrasting block monochrome. It matches the simplicity of the story.

Next is *The Aufhocker*, a mythical and deadly creature, which lurks in the shadows ready to capture its prey at any moment. Alastair McLauchlan creates a dreary and foggy backdrop to this Gothic tale. His use of light and shadow gives his art a very unique look and it is this that makes the story airy and creepy before the very anti-climactic, yet hilarious, ending.

You Are What You Eat is the third story in this horror anthology. Unsurprisingly, this is another take on the zombie apocalypse. The world is evidently plagued by zombies, but the surviving citizens are making the most of it, sort of. This one has some interesting characters that would make it a good ongoing series. The art by Gareth Sleightholme has great detail and layout that makes it striking and fun.

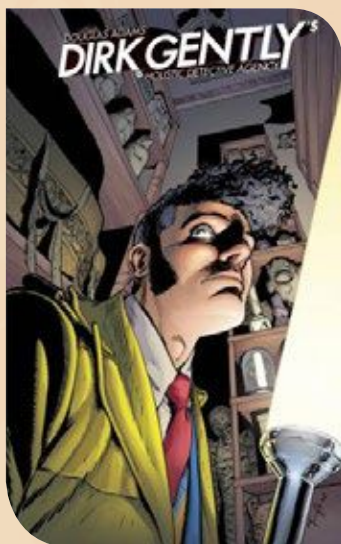
The final story, *Grimoire - Baby Bell Jar* (chapter one), is actually the first of an ongoing series, in which a mysterious crime is taking place from town to town. It seems to be happening whenever a certain circus hits the ground, at least one or two people wind up dead. When the circus is finally

chased up, they discover it's no ordinary killing and the circus turns out to be more than a freak show. The art by Alisdair Wood is brilliant and what you would expect in a big horror comic like *The Walking Dead* - intense and the character's features are beautifully captured.

All these stories have a moronic sense of humour deployed in the final twist, making them fun and unique short stories. It claims not to be for the weak hearted but if you can handle an episode of *The Walking Dead*, then this is buttercups and daisies in comparison. Despite the lack of actual terrifying intensity, the creative ideas and art are fun, and it's entertaining enough to draw you in and keep you there. It will be interesting to see where the *Grimoire* tale will go.

SAMANTHA WARD

★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆ 6



DIRK GENTLY: THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF ALL THINGS

AUTHOR: CHRIS RYALL / ARTIST: TONY ATKINS
/ PUBLISHER: IDW PUBLISHING / RELEASE
DATE: JANUARY 28TH

For those who don't know, Douglas Adams created Dirk Gently from pieces left over from the ill-fated Doctor Who story *Shada*. He is a private detective who believes in the doctrine of the interconnectedness of all things (hence

the pun in the title) and runs a so-called holistic detective agency.

He has appeared on radio (played by Harry Enfield) and more recently on TV (played by Stephen Mangan). Now it's the turn of IDW Publishing to bring Dirk to comics in a story by Chris Ryall, illustrated by Tony Atkins.

Dirk is in San Diego, due to some undisclosed trouble back in Cambridge. He wanders around before setting up base in a tearoom called Gumshoes and Tealeaves. So far, so Dirk. Meanwhile, there are two serial killers chasing him and various undead Egyptian characters.

The story wanders around anarchically and manages to fit in nods to Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, and Doctor Who. It also litters the landscape with corpses and mysteries. All ends well and Dirk ends up established in his new US home, complete with CIA agent who has him in her sights. While it's all jolly entertaining, it misses much of the essence of Dirk. In the UK, he is an outsider and plays his idiosyncrasy against the most mundane of settings. In moving to the US, he inhabits a sham US with possible little connection to everyday US life. It is hard to judge as a Brit, but maybe feel something has been lost in crossing the Atlantic. The story is not unreasonable; Adams would use Norse gods when it suited him, so Egyptian magic (even with very modern dialogue) is not a stretch.

What is also different is having the story told from many points of view, revealing much of the setup before the end. Again, this is at odds with the previous renderings of the Dirk Gently story.

The artwork neither adds nor detracts, and as a whole it entertains but misses the mark.

TONY JONES

★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆ 6





SLAINE BRUTANIA CHRONICLES BOOK TWO: PRIMORDIAL

WRITER: PAT MILLS / ARTIST: SIMON DAVIS /
PUBLISHER: 2000 AD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The 2000 AD favourite and all-round Celtic bruiser has stumbled upon more underdogs in need of a champion. Lured to the isle of Monadh, Slaine becomes the leader of a rebellion against a distinctly out of place (unless you know your late Medieval pseudo-history) Trojan occupation force.

21st century Slaine is looking decidedly

thoughtful here. Like when a band matures after having conquered their difficult second album and feel they're ready to experiment with serious and adult-looking facial hair, Slaine sports a fairly hipsterish beard (as opposed to his clean-shaven Celtic punk upstart look of his early progs) and seems to face almost as many spiritual as physical existential threats.

The artwork, as ever, is beautiful. Veering between smudgy watercolours and scratchy pen and ink (the latter particularly effective for the super creepy Gododin and his Slough cronies), it's also detailed and realistic enough to make Slaine's Warp Spasm (which can occasionally look like the artist has just gone "oh, fuck it" and started drawing lines at random) look like an extremely expensive Jim Henson model (which is attempting to replicate a cartoonist's rendering of the expression "oh, fuck it" in human skin).

As mentioned, the design of the villains is genuinely creepy, and the empty-masked Trojan warriors also look fantastic, even down to the wiggly sigil on their shields. The only problem with all the pretty in the art is that the violence (which there is plenty of) is a bit too samey. Anything too realistic would be grim, obviously, but the constant repetition of heads flying off and fountains of fondant pink blood gushing from otherwise intact bodies does sort of diminish Slaine's reputation for violence if he can't deliver it in any more imaginative way than neat decapitations and beheadings.

There is an issue, too, with the fact

that this is presumably compiled from 2000 AD strips. Accordingly, you have multiple cliffhangers that are instantly resolved, whether you always realised it was a cliffhanger or not, as well as constant repetition of Slaine's wearisome catchphrase (he's eminently severe in the work of violence, don't you know?) presumably in case any readers of 2000 AD sued for having gone an entire issue without hearing it.

But these are minor gripes. The latest Slaine does what is demanded of it very well; creepy villains, trippy theophilosophical goings-on in the background, and a heroic barbarian hero who is entirely right and moral in his brutal murder of, well, frankly we lost count of how many people.

All in all, a pretty solid continuation of the Slaine saga.

ANDREW TILDESLEY

★★★★★★★☆☆ 7



PAPERCUTS AND INKSTAINS #3

WRITERS: VARIOUS / ARTISTS: VARIOUS /
PUBLISHER: MADIUS COMICS / RELEASE DATE:
OUT NOW

The folks from Madius Comics are back with the third issue of Papercuts and Inkstains. It comes in two parts, 3A and 3B, giving readers twice as many stories to enjoy this time round. It's a gamble, given the quality of previous issues was

so high, but the writers and artists have maintained the high standard that makes this comic so refreshing.

3A offers a trio of standalone tales. The first, A Roll of the Dice, is a caper that takes place in the Wild West, as a disgruntled saloon owner plans to bring down the huge gambling den that is taking his, and the town's, money. It's an anarchic cross between Ocean's Eleven and The Magnificent Seven that is a joy to read. The third tale, Slaycation, is equally as good, offering a delightful twist on the 'teens go to a cabin on holiday and get killed' genre, one that means you'll never look at your elderly neighbours in the same light again. The highlight, and a story that turns the quality up to eleven, is Vampire Wonderland. Fantastic artwork and a suitably sparse script put the reader right in the action; it's great to see vampires as scary as they're supposed to be, but there's still room for an injection of that trademark Madius wit, and a terrific twist at the end.

3B kicks off with Future Shock-style story FPS, giving a soldier's perspective of an interplanetary war. While the twist may not come as too much of a surprise to comic veterans, it's a successful balance of humour and observation on the nature of conflict. The Perplexity, Madius's first venture into the realm of superheroes, is a strange yet engrossing tale that toys with the preconceptions of the genre, an interesting offering that we hope to see more of. Finally, the Profits of Doom are

back. These suburban cultists are as inept as ever, well on their way to accidentally destroying the world as we know it and providing a few belly laughs on the way.

Having double the amount of stories hasn't halved the quality, instead proving that the comic itself and the Madius team are getting stronger with every issue. If they keep going like this, Papercuts and Inkstains will reach the heights it deserves, and be talked about in the same breath as 2000 AD and other British greats.

ALISTER DAVISON

★★★★★★★☆☆ 9





DEATH SENTENCE LONDON 6

WRITER: MONTY NERO / ARTIST: MARTIN
SIMMONDS / PUBLISHER: TITAN / RELEASE
DATE: OUT NOW

With martial law being declared, gangs roaming the streets and super-powered drug dealers vying for territory, the city has been coming to the boil for some time now. In this sixth and final issue of Death Sentence London, that steam is released.

This series has always been a riot of excess, and the conclusion of this arc sees pitched battles in the streets and the main characters, for the most part, helpless in the face of such adversity.

Fortunately, writer Monty Nero never lets his characters take too much of a back seat, despite the scale of events. They've been the heart and soul of the series right from the beginning, making Death Sentence more than a simple "what would happen if complete bastards and no-hopers received superpowers" story. Scratch the surface of what at first glance appears to be an outrageous tale of sex and violence, and you'll find political commentary, thoughts on the creative process, and a deep desire to provoke thought as well as entertain. Crude and vulgar it may be, but it's an effective and often frightening portrayal of people and a world that, despite the craziness of events, is only around the corner from our own; not for the faint of heart, in either respect.

Artist Martin Simmonds maintains his usual high standards, too, providing stunning pages with incredible detail in every panel. His style, like that of original series artist Mike Dowling, feels perfectly suited to the story, capturing both intimate and grand moments with equal relish. He brings pencils and inks to life with a rich colour palette, making some scenes appear dreamlike when they are often the stuff of nightmares.

It's heart on the sleeve stuff, which makes it incredibly refreshing, the emotion that has gone into the work reflected in the

enjoyment of the reader. Reading in monthly issues can be difficult, as the ending of each creates a yearning for the next, so the upcoming collection will be welcomed with open arms, a worthy addition to the shelves of older comic-book fans. The next series can't come soon enough either, with this issue finishing on a cliffhanger worthy of those old Saturday morning serials.

Anyone concerned that Death Sentence may have lost its initial impact will be delighted to know that it remains an uncompromising vision that pushes boundaries and defies expectations, another reminder that comics can be used to tell stories of social and political relevance, while still being gloriously entertaining.

ALISTER DAVISON

★★★★★★★★★ 9



SYMMETRY #1

WRITER: MATT HAWKINS / ARTIST: RAFFAELE
LENCO / PUBLISHER: IMAGE / RELEASE DATE:
OUT NOW

There's been a glut of Dystopian and post-apocalyptic stories lately, whether it be on TV screens or in the pages of books and comics, which is something Symmetry seeks to address by having its setting as a perfect society that makes all men and women

equal. In this Utopia, hunger and sickness are things of the past, with all negative emotions bred out and suppressed by genetics and medicine, creativity and ambition effectively wiped out. Each person is linked to a benevolent machine, their behaviour monitored for the good of the human race.

Writer Matt Hawkins kicks off the story with a man on the run, pursued by the machines that help police this seemingly perfect society. All is not well, it would seem, and what can be seen on the surface is far from the truth. It's a solid start, one that hooks by being suitably intriguing and packed with action, but having the story go back to the birth of the hero lessens the impact. It's a formula that many dramas are using these days – showing how events have taken the characters to this opening scene – but it can prove tiresome and sometimes gives away the fates of others.

That said, the journey from child to man serves to give the reader an insight into the society and those who inhabit it. Yes, it all looks perfect, but there's something sinister and unsettling about it. The last few pages are a shock to the characters, as events take a turn for the worst and turn their wonderful world upside down. The art, by Raffaele Lenco, is stunning, providing depth to every page while maintaining the crisp and clinical look that suits the story perfectly.

As a first issue, it's intriguing rather than exciting, an opening that lures the reader in

slowly with a mounting sense of unease. The atmosphere of a safe yet sterile society is created extremely well by writer and artist; an afterword from the former reads like a sociology lesson, however, something which hopefully won't prove too invasive in the future and keep the story entertaining while it delivers its message.

ALISTER DAVISON

★★★★★★★★★ 8





TAURUS

WAGON TAIL

BEAST WAGON CREATED BY JOHN PEARSON & OWEN MICHAEL JOHNSON



ANIME-NATION

A MONTHLY ROUND
UP FROM THE
WORLD OF ANIME
AND MANGA WITH
DOMINIC CUTHBERT



First FAMILIAR OF ZERO Volume to be Published Since Author's Death

After five years since the passing of Naburo Yamaguchi, the light novel imprint MF Bunko J will finally grant fans' wishes and publish the 21st of 22 planned volumes of **The Familiar of Zero**. On February 25th, the fantasy series' continuation, as dictated by Yamaguchi and entrusted to his editors, will be released in Japan and simulpubbed in several other countries, although not necessarily as an English translation.

Boruto Manga Snags Monthly Serialisation

The torch has well and truly been passed from father to son, as the fruit of Naruto's loins snags his own manga series. Announced at the Jump Festa 2016, the new series will focus on Boruto Uzumaki, the unimaginably dubbed son of Hinata and Naruto. The scripts will be penned by Ukyō Kodachi, who's perhaps best known for his novel adaptations of **Macross Frontier** and **Mobile Suit Gundam AGE**. The new series kicks off in Shueisha's **Weekly Shōnen Jump** in the spring.



MY HERO ACADEMIA Creator to Reveal Face for the First Time

Fancy some intrigue with your manga? Strange news brings word that Kōhei Horikoshi, creator of the charming **My Hero Academia**, has scooped the Mandō Kobayashi Manga Grand Prize. The prize was the brainchild of comedian Kendō Kobayashi, who discusses manga on his Fuji TV One show Mandō Kobayashi. The show will air at midnight on January 19th, and for the first time, Horikoshi will be showing his face on television.

Second Servings of FOOD WARS! SHOKUGEKI NO SOMA

Fans of the ecchi-laced cooking anime breathed a collective sigh of relief at the announcement of a second series. It was somewhat inevitable, what with the success of the first instalment, but sets up 2016 as a grab bag of animated delights. The announcement came in the form of a dedicated cover image for 2016's issue two of **Shōnen Jump**, where Yūto Tsukuda and Shun Saeki's manga celebrated a third cooking competition.

New GURREN LAGANN Project Teased

Gurren Lagann was a special kind of weird, and it's with open arms that we welcome the tease of a new series. Since airing in 2007, nothing has quite filled the void that the barmy sci-fi series left. The official Twitter account for **Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann** has published a teaser website tantalisingly promising a new project with the words "Coming soon...". On a similar topic, **Gurren Lagann** scribe Kazuki Nakashima is joining Gen Urobuchi and Masaki Tsuji on writing scripts for the new **Concrete Revolution** series.

FUNimation Channel Set For 2016 Relaunch

Our cousins across the pond are well and truly spoiled rotten. Now FUNimation Entertainment has confirmed that it will relaunch its FUNimation Channel digital network in 2016. This follows the end of its content and brand partnership with Olympusat on December 31st. The channel, which was originally launched in 2005, promises a 'renewed focus on delivering fans the very best selection of anime content in the market'.

New Berserk anime lined up for 2016

2016 is shaping up to be another quality year for anime, with news that Berserk is continuing to peddle its particular brand of bloody medieval horror and fantasy. The first tease of the new series has landed, but the gaudy CG animation might not be up to fans' expectation. The original manga dates back to 1989, with multiple anime and film adaptations since. The series is currently in production and slated for a 2016 air date.



THE LATEST RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



SO, I CAN'T PLAY H! COLLECTION

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: TAKEO TAKAHASHI / SCREENPLAY: NARUHISA ARAKAWA / STARRING: AYA ENDO, ARISA NISHIGUCHI, HIRO SHIMONO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Ryōsuke Kaga strikes a lonely figure, left to tend the household while his mother works in Germany and his dad pushes up the proverbial daisies. Coming home from school, he meets Lisara Restall standing vacant in the rain, like a scene stolen from countless rom-coms. When he invites her home, his lewd motives barely veiled by schmaltzy sympathy, she reveals that she's a top grim reaper with the knowledge that Ryōsuke

has only months left to live. She needs the energy of a human volunteer, hence her presence in his world, and presuming that he would like to live at least a while longer, she's chosen him as her personal charge point.

From this starting point, however, what you would expect to be the main plot dribbles away into a series of ecchi-enabling scenarios, driven by the fact that Ryōsuke's main energy source is his perverted nature. Except

what he means by this is that he, like most other high school boys, gets all hot and bothered at the slightest suggestion of boobs. So any form of conflict or character progression is marred by the main character's justification in being a sex pest, and female characters scripted with as much depth and sensitivity as a blow-up doll.

Ryōsuke's only moment of insight comes in the realisation that all girls are beautiful, no matter what their breast size (bless him), which brings him to the conclusion that he should protect them all as treasures. The young women are inexplicably drawn to him and left to moan and squabble over which one means the most, beset by self-loathing and jealousy. With the relentless instances of gravity-defying F-cups, and Lisara enduring petty bullying because of her smaller bust, it's difficult to imagine any members of its marginalised female audience

not coming away furious, or even self-conscious.

The series' one redeeming feature, aside from the sumptuous, softly detailed and textured settings, is brushed off as a retrospective aside. Ryōsuke's conversation with his mother about how she met his father, oddly overdue considering his age, nonetheless proves the warmth of their relationship, further mystifying his passive lack of respect for girls his own age. Considering the supernatural mystery shrouding his parents' romance, their life together and abrupt separation, the trivial dramas in Ryōsuke's life don't match up to the complexity of the show you can imagine starring his mother.

Extras: *Textless Opening & Closing / Japanese promo / TV spots*

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

★★★★★ 4



HIDAMARI SKETCH: SERIES 1 COLLECTION

DVD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: AKIYUKI SHINBO, RYOUKI KAMITSUBO / SCREENPLAY: UME AOKI / STARRING: KANA ASUMI, KAORI MIZUHASHI, YŪKO GUTŌ, RYŌKO SHINTANI / RELEASE DATE: JAN 25TH

So the saying goes that you should never judge a book by its cover. The same can be said of animation, at least in the sense that moving pictures don't always paint the best impression. And so it is with the quirky slice-of-life outing Hidamari Sketch. The animation style is drawn from Ume Aoki's four-panel strip and animated by talented weird-mongers Shaft.

Initially, it looks more like a stilted webtoon, with

awkward movements, a questionable resolution and a Spartan approach to details. A few episodes in, and the series reveals the depth of its intention. It retains its starkness, but it's altogether a warmer affair, with Shaft at their most subtle. The animation itself is descriptive, revealing elements of the characters with repeating themes and motifs.

A few minutes into the first episode and the similarities with

Lucky Star are evident. Both originally aired in 2007, with only a viewing season to separate. The trajectory of both series openers is much the same, and both end up with conversations about food. The difference is that Hidamari Sketch uses inserts of real-life food and objects. The effect is uncanny, but after acclimatising, it adds a hysterical effect.

As ever, a slice-of-life series is only as good as its characters. Fortunately, Hidamari Sketch boasts an endearing foursome and kooky supporting characters. Main girl Yuno closes each episode monologuing from her bathtub. She's the short-haired ditz, with a heart of gold and playing up the moé factor. Miya, on the other hand, is bolshie and hyperactive, forever hungry and fanatical about food. This provides an interesting counterpoint to Hiro, whose obsession with her weight, despite her petite figure, rings startlingly true with real life. The group is topped off by Sae, an author marked by her quiet and

bashful nature. Between them, they share many common archetypes, yet the familiarity is more like spending time with a friend.

Hidamari Sketch is a year in the life of the girls of one nondescript apartment complex. The vivid characterisation sets a precedent for the lengths the lot-of-nothing formula can go. Take the relationship between Hiro and Sae. There's a suggestion of something beyond friendship, but scripted without sensationalism or exploitation. The same can be said of the interesting and unusual stylistic approach, particularly when illustrating Yuno's fever – abstract and beautiful with a touch of the supernatural. With aspects this encouraging, twelve episodes were never going to be enough.

Extras: *Also available / DVD credits / Clean Opening and Closing / 2 Original Animations.*

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

★★★★★★★★ 8

COSPLAY CATWALK

A MONTHLY
FOCUS ON
THE COSTUMED
ROLE-PLAY SCENE AT
FAN CONVENTIONS
AROUND THE WORLD

Photo: John Fisher Photography



Ena Wilson is known as Nanayena to the UK cosplay community and she has created some rather amazing costumes that we simply had to share...

STARBURST: How did you get into cosplay?

Ena Wilson: Cosplay was an unintentional downward spiral for me. I finished college with an A* in Theatre Design, didn't get into my first choice of university so with good intentions to apply again, I started to make costumes to create a portfolio. Cosplay quickly followed and it's horribly addictive. I never applied to uni again! I ended up with a career in Facilities Management.

What is your favourite element of the cosplay community?

The willingness to share is my favourite part of the community. I've learnt so much myself from watching other people build their costumes and post tutorials. I try to make my own through methods I've found

from experimentation in case they are useful to other people.

Why Twi'leks?

I've come from a background of theatrical costumes and makeup (especially CATS), so anything with a heavy makeup application is in my comfort zone and appealing. Hera from *Rebels* is my favourite; she's a pilot, an engineer, and very headstrong. Twi'lek ladies can be sexy, but they're also really strong characters.

What is your build process?

Plan, procrastinate, panic and finish everything the day of the con. It's a really bad habit that I'm trying to break. My problem is that I take on too many projects at once.

Photo: Darren Rowley Photography



What costume would you love to re-do?

I never used to open my mouth or smile for photos. I had really bad teeth. Once I made a Black Canary costume and I entered her into a masquerade, I felt so brave. The judges asked me if I could do her 'Canary Cry' and I couldn't even attempt it. I was so embarrassed. I'm in the process of having extensive orthodontics and once these braces come off the fishnets are coming back on. Definitely a remake in the works!

What's your favourite non-cosplay geeky thing?

I love musical theatre. I'm selective though, my absolute favourite is *Jeff Wayne's War of the Worlds*. I collect posters and brochures, pieces of costume, whatever my budget will allow for!

What is your next big challenge?

Dresses! I've done prosthetics, corsets, wigs, mascot heads, dresses are the next challenge. Big lavish skirts are such a temptation; I'm no princess, though! Elphaba's Act 2 dress from *Wicked* is on the cards.

How important is it to 'get into the role'?

For the sake of making the costume look good, yes. People will notice you and interact with you at cons if you are in character. It's all a part of the fun of cosplay. How far you keep the role up, though, is up to the individual. Some people don't like to break the magic, others wear their cosplay as a fun outfit to hang around cons in.

What's your favourite part of a comic con?

Buying things! There's so much variety at a con, not just all your regular stuff from comic book shops. There are often people who handmake everything from cupcakes and painted shoes to artists who draw caricatures and sell custom commissions. It's a great chance to support local artists and crafters.

What advice do you have for new cosplayers?

Don't fret over teeny tiny details. I'll spend hours obsessing over the placement of seams and matching colours - perfectionist stuff. Don't lose sleep over the details. I can't count how many times I've botched something together at the last minute, been angry at myself and convinced that it looks terrible, and then when I see photos afterwards it looked absolutely fine.

ED FORTUNE

For more information on Ena Wilson, check out [facebook.com/Nanayena](https://www.facebook.com/Nanayena)



READER'S COSPLAY "ELLIE JAYDEN"

Our regular spotlight on the scene this month lands in Ireland to meet another enthusiastic cosplayer...

STARBURST: How long have you been cosplaying?

Ellie Jayden: I've been cosplaying for three years. It was something I always wanted to try but never had the opportunity or confidence to try it out. I started to attend conventions a few years ago and decided to enter a cosplay competition with a few friends of mine. None of us had cosplayed before and we decided to dress up as villains from the Batman universe and we won first prize! I was Harley Quinn from the *Arkham Asylum* video game, it was a huge confidence boost and made me want to continue cosplaying. I always get people asking me what advice I have for people who want to start cosplaying and my advice is JUST DO IT! It is so much fun, it's creative and you will meet some wonderful people through joining the cosplaying community.

Who is your favourite character to dress as?

Harley Quinn! I used to watch *Batman: The Animated Series* as a child and I fell in love with her character. When I grew up I realised I still had a lot in common with Harley, like we were both psychology students. I also studied criminology; I've always had a big interest in how the mind works and I am pretty goofy! So I think I relate to her a lot in many ways. I find her to be a really complex character who a lot of people misjudge. She's incredibly popular in the cosplay world lately and I can see why. I

think my favourite version of Harley is the original animated version; the jester outfit is so iconic and important. I did a shoot recently, dressed in the classic jester outfit but I wore makeup inspired by Heath Ledger in *The Dark Knight*. I wanted to create a look inspired by the version of Harley I would have liked to have seen in the Nolan trilogy. A much darker version of Harley that we haven't seen before, regardless of the fact that Harley didn't make an appearance in the Nolanverse Batman films. I am the first to admit that I can't wait for the new *Suicide Squad* film to come out! I'll be first in line at the cinema! I think Margot Robbie looks amazing as Harley and I cannot wait to see Harley come to life for the first time on the big screen.

How long do you normally spend making the costumes?

It depends on the costume. I recently put together a totally D.I.Y. version of Margot Robbie's *Suicide Squad* outfit; I started making the costume when there were just a few grainy set photos that fans had taken on their phones. I try to get the best source material I can and then decide where to begin. For the *Suicide Squad* costume, I started with the t-shirt, it was a lot of fun to put together! A lot of trial and error. Most people seem to buy a printed version of the T-shirt but I wrote "Daddy's Lil Monster" with a black marker and coloured in the red with marker also, then I bled the ink to make it look really dishevelled. I even used eyeshadow on the T-shirt to make it look dirty and to create a messy effect. There are other fun aspects to putting together a cosplay like figuring out how to do the correct style of makeup or styling/dying wigs, etc. I like D.I.Y. costumes because I can get really creative with things, it's very punk! Even though mistakes are made, it is all a learning process. I usually do my

best to plan a few weeks or sometimes months ahead of a convention or event, just to make sure I have time to gather materials and put things together. It can be costly, so I think spreading the workload out over a period of time is much less stressful than leaving it until the week before the convention!

MARTIN UNSWORTH

Find out more about Ellie by checking out her social media sites: Blog: elliejayden.com, Twitter and Instagram: [@EllieJayden](https://twitter.com/EllieJayden), and [facebook.com/pages/EllieJayden/150118511666318](https://www.facebook.com/pages/EllieJayden/150118511666318).



Photo: Paul Timon Photography

Are you a cosplayer and want to see your work featured in STARBURST?

Drop us an email at cosplay@starburstmagazine.com and we'll print our favourites every month

PIXEL JUICE

NEWS AND PREVIEWS
IN GAMING
BY LEE PRICE



Kojima Heads to Sony

The situation surrounding Hideo Kojima and Konami has been shrouded in mystery for months, which is something the company didn't help with by trying to claim that Kojima was still part of the Konami team just a couple of months back. This seemed to run contrary to the fact that they wouldn't allow Kojima to collect any awards for **The Phantom Pain**, with gamers more than happy to demonstrate their disapproval of this move.

Happily, we no longer need to wonder where our next fix of Kojima will be coming from as Sony has announced that Kojima Production's next game will be a PS4 exclusive that is likely being part-funded by Sony. There is no word on what the game will be yet, though it obviously can't be anything to do with previous Konami titles for which Kojima doesn't hold the trademark.

Still, that opens the way for Kojima Productions to do something completely new, instead of having to focus on **Metal Gear Solid** most of the time. We can't be the only ones who are hoping that Kojima's partnership with Guillermo del Toro will be reignited and we will finally get the game that was meant to be **Silent Hills**, just under a different moniker, right?

COMING SOON



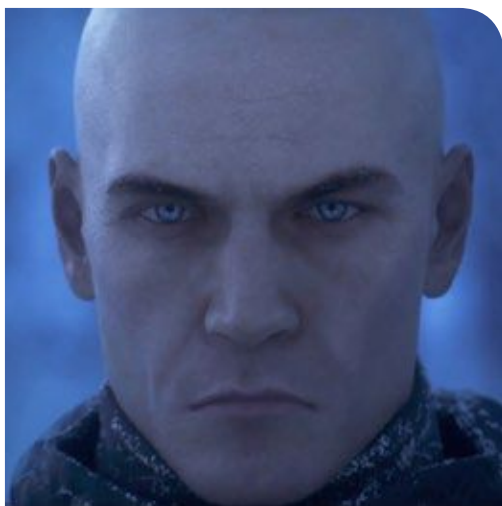
HEAVY RAIN

PLATFORM: PS4

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 4TH

David Cage seems to be taking his sweet time getting his next game to us, so instead the guys at Quantic Dream have decided to help people relive what many consider to be their magnum opus. The graphics have been touched up, but there is likely going to be very little here that should tempt people who already played the game on PS3. Still, if you have yet to experience it, the PS4 version is as likely as any to be the definitive one. It will only be available as a digital download or packaged with the upcoming Beyond: Two Souls remake.

COMING SOON



HITMAN

PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE
RELEASE DATE: MARCH 11TH

There is no getting around the fact that Hitman: Absolution was something of a disappointment. After the brilliant Blood Money, it just seemed like Absolution, despite having good ideas, failed to hit all of the right marks and came off as a slightly less enjoyable experience. The less said about the 'murder your friends' marketing campaign, the better. Still, this is Square Enix's second crack at the series and one that they have waited an entire console generation to bring us. Hopefully, it will be up to bringing the series back to its former glory.

Akuma in TEKKEN 7

Capcom and Namco have clearly forged something of a relationship in recent years, which resulted in the rather wonderful **Street Fighter X Tekken**, which was supposed to be complemented by a similar game made using the **Tekken** fighting engine that never came along.

While some of us are still waiting with baited breath for that game, Namco are just getting on with things and working on the development of **Tekken 7: Fated Retribution**. They have also announced that Akuma, of **Street Fighter** fame, will be one of the selectable characters for the game, giving us just a small taste of how a character from that series will fare in the world of **Tekken**.

The update will be made to the arcade versions of the game first, with **Tekken 7** coming to PS4 at some point in the near future.

Bayonetta to SMASH BROS.

With Cloud already being made available, **Smash Bros.** fans have plenty of reason to keep playing the series, especially as it seems to be moving to a format where it is happy to bring in big hitters from other developers to bolster the already brilliant line-up of Nintendo characters.

The latest fighter to be announced is the brilliant Bayonetta. It's easy to see how she will fit into the game based on her fighting style in her own series, but it will be interesting to see how Nintendo handles the hyper-sexualised and gory nature of the character for the **Smash Bros.** series.

Steam Exposes Gamers' Information at Christmas

Valve has always seemed to manage to avoid the hacking and other issues that have plagued the online services offered by the likes of Sony and others, but 34,000 people were very unhappy to find that the company had unintentionally revealed all of their personal information on their Steam Store.

The company claims that a combination of a DDOS attack and the huge surge of users that their Christmas sale attracted caused configuration errors that led to the information being revealed, though this will obviously be little solace for the people who were affected.

The company is currently looking into the issue to ensure that it never happens again, in addition to identifying each of the 34,000 people who were affected so that they can contact them personally with apologies. You have to imagine that said apologies will look to consist of a free game or two as well.

COMING SOON



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS HD

PLATFORM: WII U

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 4TH

The Wii U is still getting a small trickle of decent games coming out, even with the console entering its dying days. Unfortunately, there isn't a whole lot of originality going on, which means we end up with a GameCube/Wii game that has been given the old HD makeover. Still, Twilight Princess was a truly brilliant Zelda game, offering those who were disappointed with Wind Waker a game that was a little closer to Ocarina of Time in design. This is a must-have for anybody who has a Wii U and is put off by the astronomical prices can command in the collector's market these days.

COMING SOON



UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END

PLATFORM: PS4

RELEASE DATE: APRIL 29TH

It has been a long time since we last got to grips with Nathan Drake, but A Thief's End is very nearly here and is looking to provide a fitting conclusion to our intrepid explorer's story. The game should be interesting not least because it is being written by the people behind The Last of Us, rather than Amy Hennig. What this will do for the story is anyone's guess, but this may well be the first absolutely must-have PS4 exclusive, depending on your opinions on Bloodborne.

Why No Sagat in STREET FIGHTER V?

Fans of Capcom's flagship fighting series have been up in arms about the fact that perennial favourite Sagat looks set to be excluded from the fifth game. However, Capcom has come out to say that this decision is very intentional, claiming that there are too many characters in the game with similar fighting styles to Sagat that are already included.

It seems something of an odd decision, if only because Sagat has such a long and rich history, dating right back to the origins of the series.

The more cynical amongst us may feel that he is being held back for a DLC release, with developer Yoshinori Ono even hinting at that when he stated: "I understand that there are also many who wish to see other characters besides Sagat, such as Blanka and more. There's a possibility that we may add more characters in some form later, so please look forward to that." Thankfully, Capcom has already announced that all of the DLC for the game will be earnable just by playing as well, so if the legendary kickboxer makes an appearance, fans likely won't have to part with cash just to get him in their version of the game.

Gamer Tries to Sue for FALLOUT 4 Addiction

A Russian man is apparently attempting to sue Bethesda because his **Fallout 4** addiction cost him his health, marriage and job. Reports claim that he is looking for around 500,000 rubles from the company, in addition to a warning label that tells people how addictive the game can be.

A statement claimed: "If I knew that this game could have become so addictive, I would have become a lot more wary of it. I would not have bought it, or I would have left it until I was on holiday or until the New Year holidays."

Apparently, the game prompted him to go on a 3-week gaming binge that saw him neglect everything in his life to the point where said life fell apart.

It all obviously sounds rather spurious and there is no chance the daft sod will get anything for being unable to control his own stupidity. Still, his lawyers were refreshingly honest about how pointless the case is, even going so far as to claim they were doing it just to see "...how far we can go regarding this case."



Telltale and Batman

Telltale has been doing an awesome job with just about every franchise that they have managed to get their hands on, so it is with some degree of excitement that we approach the news that they will now be working on an episodic Batman game.

With the **Arkham** games now officially done and dusted, it feels right that a company that will take *The Caped Crusader* in a completely different direction are taking the helm. Telltale will obviously place a little less emphasis on action, but you have to think that their version of a Batman game is going to be focused much more on the detective side of Bruce Wayne, rather than the ass-kicking side.

Either way, we are very excited for this one, which was announced during The Game Awards 2015. A trailer is already online, though it doesn't reveal much other than the actual announcement itself.

Nintendo to Demonstrate NX at CES

Nintendo has been extremely tight-lipped about their upcoming NX, leading to tons of speculation about whether the console will follow on in the same vein as the likes of the Wii and Wii U, or if the company is finally going to start looking to compete with Sony and Microsoft directly by unleashing a powerhouse that is more likely to attract AAA titles from other developers.

Hopefully, all of those questions will be answered in January, as the console is set to be unveiled for the first time at the upcoming Consumer Electronics Show. It's a closed door showing, so most gamers won't get the chance to see it first-hand, but we should at least start getting some more solid reports about what the console actually is and if Nintendo have decided to go the more traditional route following the relative failure of the Wii U.

COMING SOON



KILLER INSTINCT: SEASON 3

PLATFORM: XBOX ONE, PC

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 24TH

*Rare are finally getting to work on one of their more beloved franchises with **Killer Instinct** these days, which is a far cry from the Kinect schlock they were putting out during the 360 era. **Killer Instinct** fans can look forward to a bunch of new characters with **Season 3**, including the likes of **Kim Wu**, **Tusk** and **Gargos** from **Killer Instinct 2**. Couple that with newcomer **Rash** and what is likely to be a few more additions to that roster between now and March and you have a game that every series fan will be splashing out on.*

COMING SOON



TOM CLANCY'S THE DIVISION

PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 8TH

It must be nice to have a name that's so famous that you can literally get paid to allow people to use it for their projects, despite your lack of involvement with them. Set in a post-apocalyptic New York that has been ravaged by a virus, your role is to explore the open-world setting to find out what caused the pandemic and what needs to be done in order to fix it. It promises fully destructible environments, so it should be fun if you want to cause a little chaos.

Konami Now Hiring for New METAL GEAR

Despite losing the man who was the mind behind the series, Konami look set to keep plugging along with the **Metal Gear Series** in the hopes that player loyalty will allow them to squeeze a bit more money from the gamers that they appear to have long stopped caring about.

The company has placed an ad looking for developers to work on the latest game in the series, which looks set to be the first mainline **MGS** game to not be headed by Hideo Kojima.

You really have to wonder if this is a wise move on Konami's part. The company has already done practically everything that it can to lose the faith of gamers all over the world during the course of 2015 and bringing one of their main franchises to players without the man who made it all possible may be a step too far for the company.

Still, if we are to be a little more optimistic, this also offers them the chance to wipe the slate clean with the series and start afresh, introducing new characters and plots in the process. Or we'll just get some nice new pachinko machines.

THE LATEST
GAMING RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



REVEAL THE DEEP

DEVELOPER: LAZY MONDAY GAMES / PUBLISHER: LAZY MONDAY LTD / PLATFORM: PC, MAC, LINUX / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Often a big problem with the horror genre is how bigger budget productions lose sight of how to really deliver a scare. Rather than truly building a tense atmosphere, what you end up with is a lot of unappealing high-res gore and a lot of badly timed jump scares. *Reveal the Deep* seems like the answer to those games, as it's extremely cheap, minimalist in every sense, but utterly terrifying.

There's little to no opening story here, not even a hint as to who you're supposed to be. All you're told is that you're a diver exploring a sunken paddle steamer and a brief tutorial on how to use the basic controls. Beyond that, you're left to your own devices, and with the constant sense of never being alone.

Above all others this is one which really cranks up the tension, constantly leaving you uncertain and questioning where to go next. While the graphical tile-set is extremely basic, the true genius stems from the use of light and the sound design. Illuminated only by your headlamp, you're often left only able to see one way with pitch darkness ahead of you. For all you know there is something creeping right at your very back, and many threats remain skulking in the dark, retaining only the bleakest glimmer of their eyes. This is only enhanced thanks to the sheer lack of any music in the game, only offering the loud thud of your weighted boots on the metal to echo about you, and the constant creak

of the vessel in the deep. However, there are often changes, slight shifts in the pitch, which keeps you questioning if you've disturbed some massive seagoing leviathan or if something is close by in the dark. Even with this, however, it's astounding how it accomplishes such a sense of isolation as you progress deeper into the vessel.

Such elements would be terrifying enough, but many puzzles require you to switch off your lamp, during which the entire environment can rapidly shift about. At these points the entire map can change, allowing new areas to emerge out of the bioluminescent coral, or somehow shift back to their previously pristine glory. We'll leave you to discover the truth behind that particular horror for yourself but it's in these subtle moments that the game really shines. There's an over-familiarity with gigantic, towering monsters and unstoppable pursuing foes, but there's always something much more scary in seeing the locked hatch you passed a dozen times before suddenly left ajar.

Unfortunately, the real problem is that the early stages can seem too reliant upon unfamiliarity with older horror genre rules or even platforming elements. Certain enemies don't offer much more of a threat than simply barring your way and the labyrinthine nature of certain levels can become frustrating rather than truly scary. What's more is that many aspects seem like more of a proof of concept at times, especially

when it comes to the minimalist look (which sadly does lose its edge towards the end) and a lack of any real settings beyond very basic graphical alterations.

Still, for all its flaws, let it be clear that *Reveal the Deep* is easily one of the single best bargains of 2015 and one of the best examples of how to nail horror. Definitely pick up this one if you have even a few pennies to spend.

CALLUM SHEPHARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



STARBURST



FINAL FANTASY VI (STEAM EDITION)

DEVELOPER & PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX / PLATFORM: PC / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Despite its long lauded history, there are several titles that seem to define Final Fantasy. While the others are by no means slouches in the writing or gaming department, VII, IX and X all seem to be held up as pinnacles of the series, but even beyond them we have VI. As the last hurrah of the SNES era, it was fitting that it ended on one of the biggest, broadest stories of the entire franchise, and arguably one of the best told. With that in mind, however, it's a damnable

shame such a classic has been resurrected in a half-baked, poorly programmed port, which pales before even the most basic ROM-hack.

The story here is one of defiance, loss and sacrifice, following the story of Terra Branford and the war, which would ultimately shatter the very foundations of the world. Despite Square's almost chronic obsession with tinkering with past stories, this thankfully remains unchanged, but nearly everything else

here has been tampered with, weakening this great classic. The most prominent among these hits you right out of the starting gate, as your ears start to bleed from the shrill cacophony blasting out of the speakers. Poorly optimised and amateurishly translated, the game's melodies are not only badly balanced but have picked up some bizarrely shrill notes, which transforms its soundtrack into an endurance test. This is to say nothing of the visuals. While it touts the re-drawn sprites as a selling point, many prove to be remarkably ugly, lacking the same pixel charm of the older generation.

The problems don't stop upon getting into the mechanics. While the basic stats, systems and levelling system has been adapted without any problems, the interface was never made with keyboard or controller in mind. No, instead apparently Square has opted to simply re-use the mobile port's interface, a cost-cutting measure which leaves you stumped trying to navigate clunky and ill-suited menus intended for touch screens. Top this off with no options to

configure controllers, a launcher prone to crashes and visuals that can't even reach 1080p, and it's easy to call this one blight upon the franchise.

There is still a good Final Fantasy game somewhere in here, but you have to squint pretty damn hard to see it. For a story as great as VI's, all of this might have even been worth stomachaching, but given the multiple remakes bereft of these problems, this is simply inexcusable. Avoid this one at all costs and stick to the Game Boy Advance port, folks.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★ 3



MAGIC: THE GATHERING - BATTLE FOR ZENDIKAR FAT PACK AND EVENT BOX

DESIGNER: VARIOUS / PUBLISHER: WIZARDS OF THE COAST / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Those familiar with Magic: The Gathering will know that the world-famous card game refreshes and renews itself through regular themed waves of new cards. Each scheduled release of cards tends to have a theme. The most recent of these is Battle for Zendikar. The setting is one of wild magic; pretty much everything is magical on the plane of Zendikar and that's why it was used to trap the reality-destroying monsters known as the Eldrazi. Battle for Zendikar's backstory has the Eldrazi up and about and being titanic beings of utter annihilation, they need

to be stopped. The set seems to focus on the worst of the bunch, Ulamog, the "Infinite Gyre".

One of the easiest ways to dive right in is to get your hands on a Fat Pack; a big box filled with cards and other useful items. The Battle for Zendikar Fat Pack contains a Players' Guide with pictures of all cards in the set, two boxes to carry your decks in, nine 15-card booster packs, 80 full-art basic land cards and a twenty-sided die that can be used to track numbers when playing. This all comes in a rather pretty and solid box that can be used to store cards.

The land cards are quite pretty and will certainly be a draw for all Magic players. Land cards are an essential mechanic to the game, and it's nice to have new (and pretty) versions of these essential game components. The additional 135 cards from the boosters are a good way to dive into the game, especially for old hands. We found we could make a couple of decent decks out of the cards we had, and the set is good value for what you get.

For those who aren't as confident with deck-building, there's the Event Box, which contains an 'event deck' of 60 cards plus a 15-card 'sideboard' for fine tuning. The Event Box also comes with another 20-sided number tracker. The deck is a really powerful black/green set filled with cards that would cost way more to purchase individually on the after market.

Rules wise, Zendikar is filled with lots of interesting ideas. 'Awaken', for example, lets you turn lands into creatures as Zendikar itself rises to meet the monsters, and there are plenty of cards in the set that make using this regularly an efficient strategy. 'Rally' is back as a rule, which means the good guys can help each other defeat the

horrors. 'Converge' does a similar thing, allowing multiple mana sources to be more effective. The Eldrazi get some cool abilities as well; 'Ingest' lets you devour opponents, taking cards out of play for the entire game, and 'Processor' let you take further advantage of your lunch. The 'Devoid' trait allows some monsters to have no colour; this means they have some key strategies closed to them, but an advantage over certain magics.

Overall, Battle for Zendikar is a great addition to a great game, and one we want to see more of; we can't get enough of those monsters.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★ 8



In the prescence of the Angel of Death,
a disparate group of holocaust survivors
carry on...

with only their..

STIFF UPPER LIP

A One -shot
comic, available
from Comixology

By Paul Carey

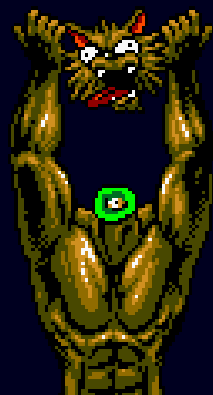
Printed version
with bonus
material from
Lulu.com

www.comixology.co.uk/stiff-upper-lip-1



RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT
THE WORLD OF
RETRO GAMING
BY CHRIS JACKSON



is permanent. If one of the kids dies, they're gone for good. You get to carry on with the rest of the group, but the numbers soon start dwindling to the point where you may well find yourself all alone...

MONSTER PRO WRESTLING (PC Engine/TG16, 1991)

Seeing as we've kicked off with a game called *ObsCure*, here's one that actually is obscure! What we have here is a turn-based wrestling strategy game, in which a selection of biologically mutated creatures takes turns to roll a die before beating the living daylight out of each other. There's very little skill involved, as all you need to do is press a button to randomly pick a number which determines the effectiveness of your attack. Whichever monster picks the highest number then launches into one of their special moves, which vary from projectile attacks to smashing your opponent's head into the ringpost to some full-on weird-as-you-like magic kind of stuff, all displayed in the form of animated cutscenes. It's pretty gory stuff (or as gory as 16-bit graphics can be) in a goofy kind of way, with liberal splatters of blood and limbs flying around all over the place and severed heads landing back on their owner's body with a forlorn expression on their face before being pummelled through the floor by a victorious Mushroom Man. Opponents' moves can be reversed via furious button mashing, and there are opportunities to level up your character in the mad scientist's laboratory between bouts. Given the amount of red pixels involved, this maybe isn't one for the kids, but 'grownups' (definitely in inverted commas) should be able to find enough amusement to pass half an hour or so.

PLAYER  MONSTER



HP 63
ST 40
MP 45
SP 32
GT 08

ポイズンマンはヒップドロップにい
った



HP 28
ST 51
MP 61
SP 28
GT 17

Happy 2016 everybody! Not that we're too concerned with such futuristic matters around these parts, but it's nice to be polite, isn't it? Have we all got a bit of leftover Christmas money burning holes in our pockets? Here are a few suggestions of things you might like to spend it on!

OBSCURE (PS2, 2004)

Anyone up for leading a gang of dopey teenagers through a survival horror game set in a school? Oh, go on then. A bunch of kids discover all manner of otherworldly goings-on when they get trapped in school one night, and it's up to you to help them work out what's going on! Players control two of a possible five classmates, with a simple button press switching between the two at any time. Or, if you've got a real life friend, there's the option of having them join in so you can play the entire game co-operatively. Each in-game character has their own unique ability, such as faster lock picking or a higher proficiency with weapons, but none of these turn out to be essential - it's possible to complete the game using whichever character you want, but you may find that one of the other kids

might enable you to get through certain sections a little bit more easily.

While some sections of the game are pretty straightforward, there are one or two puzzles that will fox even the most ardent horror survivalists. Living up to its name, some of the puzzle solutions can be very obscure indeed. As we know, any decent game in this genre needs more than puzzles to make it a hit, and *ObsCure* features a healthy (or as healthy as monsters can be, anyway) selection of foul baddies to dispatch along the way. Using what was a fairly unique mechanic at the time, these undead atrocities are sensitive to light, meaning they need to be softened up by shining your torch at them in order to lower their resistance to physical attacks. One thing you need to know just in case they get you before you get them - in *ObsCure*, death



STARTROPICS (NES, 1990)

And finally for this month, a relatively unknown action-adventure/RPG on the NES in which a young chap called Mike goes to spend a couple of weeks with his archaeologist uncle at his laboratory on a piece of land in the middle of the ocean known as C-Island. Except when Mike arrives, wouldn't you just know it, he finds his uncle has disappeared! Then off we go on an adventure around various islands to find out what's happened. It's a simple enough setup that paves the way for encounters with sea creatures, cave monsters, talking animals, and even aliens...

Both graphically and gameplay-wise, *StarTropics* is very similar to a slightly updated version of the original *Legend of Zelda*. Viewed from above, the 'overworld' parts of the game are where you'll travel around talking to the locals in an attempt to find clues relating to your next goal. On entering a dungeon, however, the emphasis of the game shifts from fact finding to combat and puzzle-solving; working your way through multiple underground lairs and caverns until you find and defeat the boss at the end of each one.

In many ways, *StarTropics* is pretty much what everyone had hoped *Zelda II* would be - the same *Zelda*-style gameplay, but with a new story and nicer looking graphics. Upon its release, reviews were generally favourable but for some reason, *StarTropics* just didn't catch on with gamers at the time. Original copies were even sold with a physical letter that was designed to be dipped in water to reveal a clue for use in the game, which is a pretty unique selling point if ever there was one. Some things just aren't meant to be, though, and *StarTropics* now seems to have been largely forgotten. Available on Nintendo's Virtual Console, it's well worth looking this one up if you've ever enjoyed an old *Zelda* game or 8-bit RPG. And then when you've finished it, get the sequel *Zoda's Revenge* because that's great as well!



RETRO FIGHTS

STARBURST: What are your earliest gaming memories?

El Ligerito: I think my first ever games memory was being round at a friend from primary school's house, so I was probably around eight, and he had a NES. Literally the only game I can remember him having was a *Batman* game, but I remember thinking it was great! Then my best mate ended up getting a Master System, which was my first exposure to the whole Nintendo vs Sega deal.

Tell us about your gaming history...

My first console was a SNES. I remember getting *Super Mario All-Stars* with it and just being hooked. Then *Mario Kart* and *Theme Park* were the next big games for me. Over the years, I tried to keep up with stuff, owning a PS1, PS2, PS3 and my girlfriend just recently bought me a PS4.

I actually had a SNES and a MegaDrive that I bought off eBay and then I sold them, so recently my girlfriend bought me a SNES! She's quite into games as well, so she's always going to random little second hand shops and turning up with plastic bags of old games! I honestly wish I had more time for it, as I'm getting more and more into playing again.

Is there anything you really wanted back then but didn't have?

The only game I always really wanted was *WWF Raw* on the SNES, but my mum went to buy me it one day as a surprise, but was told nobody made it anymore (which doesn't seem like a real thing). When my other half bought me the SNES, that was one of the games she got with it and I could finally play it 20 years later! It's awful. Absolutely awful.

What are your all-time favourite games?

I'm a huge Mario fan. In fact, I'm a big platform gamer in general. So any Mario game is pretty high on the list. I was always a massive fan of the *Resident Evil* series. I also loved the *Oddworld* games, and, of course, I bought any wrestling game going! Even the utter dross ones that I've only ever played once.

Do you have any proud gaming moments?

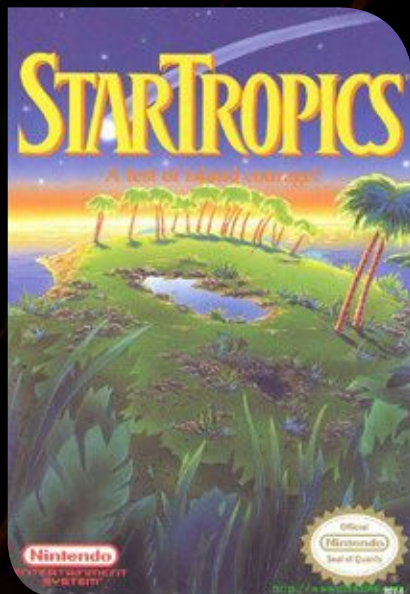
Sitting through all the cut-scenes of *Metal Gear Solid 4* and managing to follow the plot!

Now, the age old question: new games vs. old games - which is better?

Honestly, I don't mind! I think there are obviously benefits to having vastly improved graphics and the size of the games, but the main onus should be on it being fun and engaging. And there are plenty of older games that still have that charm!

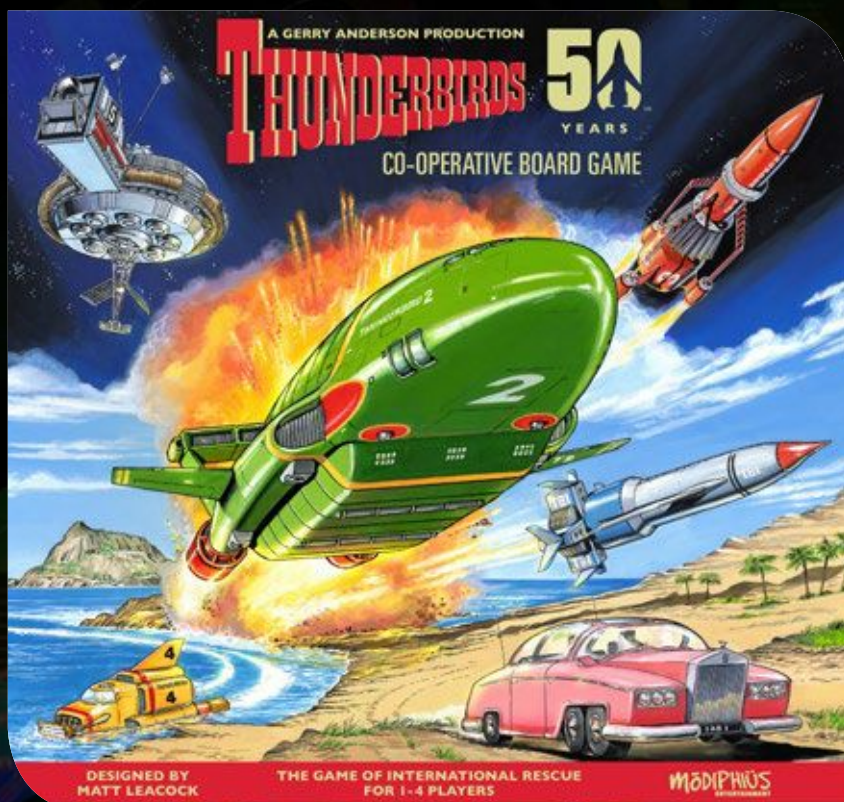
Anything else you want to add?

Yeah, if anybody ever feels like being generous and adding to my collection, please tweet me at @ligerito1 ha ha!



ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE
GUIDES YOU
THROUGH THE
REALM OF
TABLETOP GAMING



Certain games get a lot of play in the Secret STARBURST Thunderdome, and *Pandemic*, Matt Leacock's infamous game of global disease-based disaster and co-operation, has been a regular for some time. That is, until Modiphius Entertainment brought out the rather charming *Thunderbirds Co-Operative Board Game*.

It's also been designed by Leacock and has a similar theme to *Pandemic*, namely that the players work together to prevent imminent global disasters. This makes sense. After all, the classic *Thunderbirds* TV show is all about an elite team of disaster recovery specialists (called International Rescue) who have super-advanced rescue vehicles, and whizz around a futuristic Earth saving people when horrible accidents happen.

You take the role of one of the Tracy brothers (each of whom pilot a Thunderbird rescue vehicle) or super-competent spy, Lady Penelope, who pilots the specially equipped Limo, FAB-1. Purists will want to point out that it's her chauffeur and friend Parker who always drives FAB-1. Just go with it. In

this game Lady Penelope will be flying rocketships and super-subs. Parker isn't playable in the basic set, but there is an expansion coming out soon.

The *Thunderbirds* board game already begins with things going wrong. As play begins, three disasters are looming. These serve as a sort of doomsday counter. Basically, every round, the cards shuffle down a spot

on the disaster track. If they reach the end of the track, then it's all over. You need to get your character to leap into a Thunderbird (it helps if it's the right one) and fix the problem.

Disasters are averted and plots are foiled in the same way; get the appropriate Thunderbird pilots and vehicles to the right part of the planet, and roll some dice; you need to get higher than a certain number to win. However, every time you roll, there's a chance The Hood will also get a bonus, that dastardly villain.

Each hero has a special power; Lady Penelope can gather intelligence tokens, for example, which can be used to solve all sorts of messes. Gordon gets a bonus to see rescues and generate further bonuses if he's in his submarine, and so on. The result is that you work together as a team, darting around the board to help each other out. Need a mole machine in El Salvador to save some miners? Better get Thunderbird 2 to drop off some gear. Suspicious sabotage in Europe? Time to get someone into Thunderbird 5 to scan the planet (and of course, John is best suited for the job).

The game has an awful lot of lovely pieces. For a start, the Thunderbirds themselves are pretty nifty. Each character has their own head-shaped 'peg' that slots into the models. Thunderbird 2 will neatly accommodate Thunderbird 4 or even FAB-1, which is sort of pleasing.

The game is brilliantly designed. There are many, many ways to solve each disaster, so rather than various players bickering over who should do what, you tend to trust each other and hope. The random elements are just random enough to defeat boring



number crunching, but not so random that maths-minded people will walk away. The game is almost always one round from everything ending; disaster is literally a turn away in most cases. This makes the game very absorbing and puts you on the edge of your seat. It's as if the game is the love child of *Arkham Horror* and *Pandemic*.

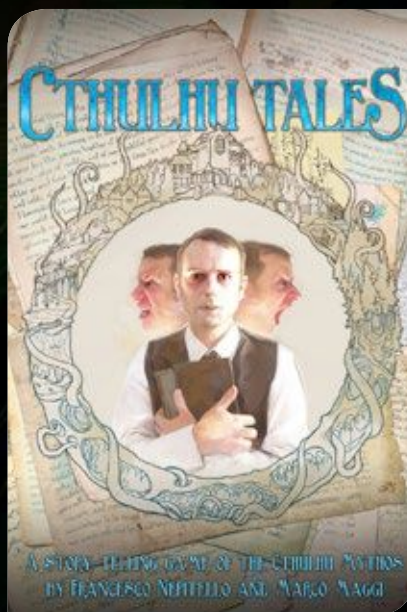
It's addictive stuff, so much so that we've had to put a ban on humming the *Thunderbirds* tune whilst playing.

Talking of all things Arkham related, those lovely people at Cubicle 7 games have decided to point their considerable storytelling talents at the Cthulhu Mythos. Their new game, *Cthulhu Tales* (which did very well in a recent Kickstarter), puts you in the role of an inmate at the notorious Arkham Sanatorium. Each player has to tell their tale without going mad or being administered 'treatment' from the sinister sanatorium staff. This is a card game, and cards are played to keep the player on their toes; the idea is to tell your tale of horror without going totally mad. Players can add hazards (such as strange statues of long-dead gods) to make the story harder to tell, and so on.

Play demos so far make it look really good; a crunchier and darker take on the Baron Munchausen game and similar sorts of storytelling improve games that have been around since parlour games.

It's the sort of thing that Cubicle 7 excels at and we are looking forward to its release in 2016 so we can give the game a spin. The premise of the game does put us in mind of another, now long out of print card game called *Mythos*. That also featured a heavy storytelling element, though it was more about solving mysteries than telling tall tales. We may very well have to delve into *Mythos* in more detail in a future column.

Another game of note (and something that will be getting more than its fair share of play over the winter) is *Pointless The Board Game*. Board game adaptations of TV quiz shows are not a new thing, of course. The problem with most quiz show games is that they lack the charm and slickness of the source material. Sad to say that *Pointless The Board Game* does not come packed with your own Alexander Armstrong to



charmingly suggest things to you. If you don't know the show, it's pretty much a standard quiz show with the twiddle that the most obscure but correct answer scores the lowest points. The person who scores closest to zero wins.

The board game does this as well; the questions are gimmicked to give multiple options and so on, and there's a well-designed score board so you can at least pretend you're the voice of Dangermouse presenting a popular British TV show. The game does mimic the show a bit too closely, which means players get eliminated over the course of play. Luckily, the game is rather quick fire, so being knocked out early isn't too boring. Mostly, the *Pointless* board game is worth it for the terrible impersonations and the fascinating questions.

A note to colonials: Alexander Armstrong is a very, very British chap who also voices Dangermouse, a top kids TV cartoon about a spy who happens to be a mouse. If you do not know who Dangermouse is, then you owe it to yourself to find out.

Talking of family friendly fun, I recently got my hands on Renegade Games' delightfully named *Flip the BIRD*. Despite the name, this is not a game about rude



hand gestures. Instead, it's a strange cross between *Flux* and *Uno*. The aim of the game is to collect the high-scoring bird cards, whilst playing rules changing cards to slow down your opponents. Placing a bird card reversed flips the BIRD and changes the rules. It's a very short and very fast game from the same chap who designed the *Killer Bunny* series of games (which players either loved and played constantly, or hated and avoided; no middle ground). We found *Flip the BIRD* no more challenging than *Dobble* or *Uno* to play, and a great warm-up game.

Renegade are also the people currently publishing the excellent *Snow Tails* by The Lamont Brothers. In case you've missed it, *Snow Tails* is a racing game. You assemble the board using specially shaped track cards, and decorate the racecourse with speed gates, trees, and narrow passages and so on. The unique selling point here is that it's a race game with huskies. You're on a sled, and two doggies are dragging you across the snow at high speed. You have to manage your hounds well otherwise you're going to smack into trees or even worse. The game has a card mechanic that lets you 'toggle' the effectiveness of your animals to some extent, but mostly this is a fast-moving game about balancing the power of two dogs, avoiding obstacles and not smacking into your opponent. It's charming, it's atmospheric, and it's really, really good fun.

Oh and before I go: I recently learned that in the forthcoming *Star Wars Rebellion* game, you don't just play one hero, you actually get to manage the whole faction (Rebels, etc.) and send out various heroes on missions. That sounds even more fun; we can't wait to play it. Until next time, please feel free to write in and tell us what games you're playing. +

Ed Fortune can be tweeted at @ed_fortune and contacted via ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com



WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM
AROUND THE WEB
THIS MONTH WITH
JACK BOTTOMLEY



DEAD GOOD MERCH

After years of planning, development, setbacks, insecurities and Ryan Reynolds practically pleading, **Deadpool** is **FINALLY** here. The wise-cracking assassin certainly has taken his time tearing it up on the big screen but now that he's arrived, he looks to have brought a hell of a lot of profanity, violence, laughter, weapons, and mayhem with him. So seeing as you can't get yourself a red and black outfit and shoot stuff (well you could, but we give it five minutes at best before the cops cart you off), why not get the gear in support of Marvel's Merc with a Mouth? And over at beltsbucklestees.com, they have you covered when it comes to **Deadpool** merchandise.

Firstly, you have something he doesn't have - no, not sanity - pockets! So put them into good use and instead of just having your cash swirling around, wrap it inside this Deadpool Wallet - designed in a faithful style that depicts the antihero on the attack. And as if that wasn't enough to fend off any pickpockets, how about this wickedly thought-up T-shirt that plasters the front of your torso and abs - or flabs in this writer's case - with the Deadpool costume and physique. And what better way to top off this gathering of gear, than with a belt buckle? One that is simple in design but no less cool for it. The buckle is the Deadpool logo, which is practically his mask and arched white eyes. One thing's for sure - with all this gear on, you certainly won't look like 'an avocado had sex with an older avocado'.

DEADPOOL WALLET (DEADPOOL ATTACK) - £15
DEADPOOL T-SHIRT (COSTUME) - £17
DEADPOOL LOGO BELT BUCKLE - £15
ALL AVAILABLE FROM BELTSBUCKLESTEEES.COM



BUMP BAG

Many movies this year are looking to give you goosebumps, but **Goosebumps** is just looking to give you a good time. The film is based on R. L. Stine's children's horror novels and stars Jack Black as the man himself. So to celebrate the hugely popular book series (which you can read all about on page 30) and its arrival back into the mainstream - after the equally popular '90s series - we had a quick look for some merchandise. And wouldn't you know, the Internet was full of it (not in that way)! One of the more memorable items was this neat drawstring bag, which is a spooky book lover's dream, as Stine's *The Girl Who Cried Monster* inspires it. This would make a brilliantly unexpected treat for the young or old **Goosebumps** fan in your life.

GOOSEBUMPS: THE GIRL WHO CRIED MONSTER - £20
AVAILABLE FROM REDBUBBLE.COM

MR. DARC... BRAINS!

When it comes to crossovers, Seth Grahame-Smith's **Pride and Prejudice and Zombies** takes the biscuit. The 2009 novel inspired by zombie fiction and Jane Austen's classic (it was only logical) was not going to go long before being turned into a movie and admittedly Burr Steers' film has taken longer than expected to arrive (read about the film on pages 36) but it is finally here. So other than picking up the book, how can you get in the right frame of mind for the film? Well, you could sport this shirt from **nerdkungfu.com**, which is enough to have people's eyes 'excessively diverted' towards the kick-ass girl wearing it!

PRIDE, PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES GIRLS' T-SHIRT - \$12.95 USD
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TEE TEE TWISTER

Believe it or not, Robert Rodriguez's **From Dusk till Dawn** is 20 years old! So to celebrate the upcoming anniversary of the much-adored bloody cult classic, there is only one thing to do... head down to Titty Twister! Sadly (well, not so sadly for all those dismembered customers), that bar is fictitious, but that doesn't stop you from celebrating the coolest fictional joint this side of the Mos Eisley cantina, with this vibrant shirt from **grindstore.com**, which is classily decorated with the bar's unashamedly rude'n'lewd neon logo! This purple shirt is perfect for the male movie buff and although it says 'men's T-shirt', we are sure those rowdy female fans (you know who you are) of Rodriguez's film would be able to easily find one of these great shirts in a comfortable size too. Happy 20th Seth and Richard!

TITTY TWISTER MEN'S T-SHIRT - £9.99
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PAUL MOUNT'S



This month, we fly high with SUPERGIRL and wave a potentially final farewell to DOCTOR WHO following a horrific Christmas catastrophe...

Back in 1978, the Salkinds brought Christopher Reeve's Kryptonian Man of Steel – that's Superman to you – to the big screen, famously promising 'you'll believe a man can fly'. The special effects were revolutionary, but now it's really only charitable to say that they haven't exactly stood the test of time. These days, thanks to the miracle of CGI, our TV and film overlords can not only make a man (or woman... or just about anything) fly, they can do it as a matter of course and apparently entirely effortlessly. **Supergirl**, for example, in CBS's sprightly new superhero TV hit (airing on Sky 1 in the UK), whizzes and soars across the sky in FX sequences so seamless and apparently casual that it's easy to forget they actually are FX sequences. They just are what they are: a woman in a rather fetching superhero costume pitching and wheeling and hurtling about without the help of cheesy back projection and without a matte line in sight. We've come a long, long way...

What's also remarkable about **Supergirl** is that it's nothing like as bad as I assumed it would be. You might remember the extended teaser trailer which CBS released a good few months before the show's US debut (the first episode was eventually leaked online in its entirety... apparently) and the series looked like a horrible hollow stinker, an unholy combination of **Sex and the City** and **Ugly Betty** with Supergirl's alter ego Kara Danvers working for some glossy monolithic media corporation, fumbling and bumbling as she attempts to keep her identity secret and getting into silly, patronising, look-at-me-I'm-a-ditzy-girl scrapes with her superhero antics shoved aside in favour of romantic trysts with a bit of tame super-powered adventuring thrown in here and there. Fortunately, the

actual show is a bit of a revelation. Comic book fans are raving about **The Flash** and **Arrow**, but it seems that **Supergirl** comes closer than the rest to capturing that big, bold, four-colour comic book magic as it strikes an agreeable and endlessly watchable balance between blousy superhero action and the all-important 'human interest' angle that all such larger-than-life characters now demand if they're to work on the big or small screen.

Supergirl is great fun. It's refreshingly free of angst (good as the likes of **Daredevil** and **Jessica Jones** are – and, let's face it, they're in a completely different league as TV shows – they're not exactly brimming over with the feel-good

factor) and is happy to throw as many big concepts and daft, colourful ideas at the screen as it can in the hope that some of them will stick. And, in fairness, many of them do. The show sets off like a rocket and really doesn't let up with its heady stew of mad comic book action – lots of it – and human drama as Kara decides to become a costumed superhero in National City like her more famous cousin over in Metropolis whilst keeping under the radar as a junior at CatCo Worldwide Media, where she's little more than a put-upon gopher for the bitchy, snippy Cat Grant (Calista Flockhart). Kara's earthly sister Alex (Chyler Leigh) has her own secrets; she's working for a top secret organisation called the Department of Extranormal Operations (DEO) – a mash-up of **Doctor Who**'s UNIT and **Torchwood** – which covertly investigates alien activity and keeps hostile extra-terrestrials under lock and key in their subterranean desert base. More prosaically, Kara has two admirers: Jimmy Olsen (Mehcad Brooks), Superman's best friend, who has shipped out from Metropolis to take up a new post as CatCo's art director, and geeky computer spud Winn (Jeremy Jordan). Although he also has a soft spot for Kara, she really only has eyes for Jimmy who, unfortunately, is reconciled with his former lady love Lucy Lane (sister of you-know-who in Metropolis). But Kara's not one to moon over a man; when she decides to become a superhero after a spectacular plummeting aircraft rescue in the first episode, she is quickly thrown into combat with a stream of equally super-powered bad guys who have escaped from Krypton's correctional facility Fort Rozz, which has crashed on Earth, as well as her own embittered aunt Astra, who has fled the legendary and infamous Phantom Zone. As if all this isn't enough, she's got to tangle with super-powered human baddies like Livewire, deadly robots (Red Tornado) and even one of her cousin's old enemies, Reactron. It's all wonderfully



SUPERGIRL



SUPERGIRL

exciting, massively high concept, utterly, shamelessly comic book, and absolutely refreshingly unapologetic about its mission statement. It's the purest superhero series we've had since **Batman** in the 1960s.

What really makes the show work, though, is its casting of Melissa Benoist as Kara/Supergirl. She's terrific; a gutsy, enthusiastic performer who hurls herself into the show's frequent action sequences and fights, but she finds the light and shade both in Supergirl – unsure of her own abilities and her place in the superhero scheme of things – and in Kara, trying to keep out of the limelight and blend into the background. Frankly, she lights up the screen with her effervescence; she's having the time of her life here and she more than makes up for any cracks in the show's fearless format. And obviously, there are some cracks. In the first few episodes, the show seems to rely on Superman as a conceptual crutch a bit more than it needs to; contractually, Supes can't appear properly in the show, but his presence is never far away as Kara wonders if she can live up to her cousin and those around her constantly refer to Superman and his own relationship with the people of Metropolis. It's understandable that the new show might want to trade on the Superman brand for a while but with the Man of Steel's last two cinematic outings having not exactly set the world on fire, **Supergirl** would do well to leave the constant references alone now and make its own way in the world. I'm also not sure that the DEO isn't a millstone too many around the show's neck. Supergirl has become a reluctant agent for the organisation, run by Hank Henshaw (David Harewood, who has had to utter some extraordinarily creaky dialogue), whose own 'secret identity', revealed in episode seven, brings to the screen one of the most obscure characters in DC mythology and whose appearance will probably floor comic book fans who just couldn't have seen that one coming. Flockhart's Cat Grant also seems like a

bit of a stereotypical power-bitch but at least the show is making some efforts to mellow and humanise her and as Episode Eight rolls around – the last until the show resumes this month after its mid-season break – her place in Kara's life has changed forever and it'll be interesting to see where she goes next now she's figured out Kara's secret.

So there you go. I'm a **Supergirl** fan and I'm happy to say it loud and proud. It's a manically freewheeling show, fearlessly tackling the superhero genre head-on with wonderfully choreographed action/FX sequences that are often almost feature film quality and, in Benoist, a break-out TV star whose charm and zest carries the show over its bumps and lumps and (frequent) absurd jumps in credibility. Less gloomy than **Arrow** and more assured and shameless than **The Flash**, **Supergirl** has become my go-to superhero supergal. Well, maybe very slightly behind **Jessica Jones**...

DOCTOR WHO

The 2015 **Doctor Who** Christmas Special *The Husbands of River Song* – an episode so embarrassing, pointless and inept it would have shamed a junior school pantomime – drew an ignominious curtain across what must surely be the weakest (and therefore worst) series of **Doctor Who** in the now-tired show's long history. The episode, I'm sorry to inform those of you who wisely turned off after five minutes or remind those who have battled to expunge it from their memories since it exploded across our festive screens like a rancid Christmas pudding – started with a shot of the TARDIS with the sign 'Carol Singers will be Criticised' hanging from the door (oh, my sides!) before the Doctor hove into view wearing a pair of hilarious hologram antlers and exchanged deathless, witless banter with the bald fat one from **Little Britain**. Well, things can only get better, you'd be forgiven for thinking. Far, far from it. I'll not dwell too long on the sixty-minute televisual abortion that followed beyond the sad fact this was quite easily the most appalling, distressing, and misguided piece of TV I've ever had to endure – and bearing in mind it was another work of genius from Steven Moffat, many of whose scripts for **Doctor Who** have already plumbed fabulous new depths of banality and laughable, irrational derivativeness, that's quite a feat. Let us speak of *The Husbands of River Song* no more and never again.

In truth, this ninth series of **Doctor Who** really struggled to achieve any momentum, presenting a run of plodding, largely inert episodes bereft of any real imaginative thinking and, as usual, sabotaged by the current showrunner's wildly erratic and random plotting and haphazard characterisation. Reimagining the Doctor as a would-be Rock God strumming an electric guitar whilst wearing 'sonic shades', hoodies, and baggy T-shirts was a comically desperate attempt to appeal



SUPERGIRL

to the 'yoof' audience lost by the largely excellent Peter Capaldi's more patrician portrayal in Series Eight. It was another stratospherically bad creative decision from a team that clearly has no idea what it's doing anymore and I only hope Mr Capaldi wasn't as embarrassed playing the Doctor as a Desperate Divorced Dad as I frequently was watching him. Jenna Coleman's Clara remained aboard the TARDIS long after her sell-by date (although she had the wit to bail out before the Christmas turkey arrived) and was given pretty much nothing of any note to do throughout the series until Moffat and company's mad scramble in the last few episodes to crowbar her into something she had never been in an attempt to justify her 'dramatic' (but ultimately compromised) exit in Episode Ten.

After a stupefying run of stultifying stories in the first half of the series (the show was always going to struggle to recover from the dreadful double-whammy of Moffat's terrible Davros/Dalek episodes), things seemed to be looking up in Peter Harness's two part Zygon story, which at least finally allowed Capaldi to properly demonstrate his remarkable acting chops in a standout sequence in its second episode. Mark Gatiss' 'found footage' tale *Sleep No More* was really no such thing but it was a brave, if flawed, attempt to do something different with the show's currently straitjacketed storytelling form. So too was *Heaven Sent*, a Capaldi single-hander (virtually), which again saw Moffat gleefully rewriting long-established Who lore in an episode so full of its own imagined cleverness it forgot to tell an actual story – something we're unfortunately all too accustomed to from the show in Moffat's 'Golden Age' tenure. The extended series finale – which was actually fascinatingly entertaining to the extent that I could see what Moffat was trying to do even if I didn't necessarily agree with the way he was doing it or even begin to understand why he was doing it – was an exercise in finally wresting the show away from the embrace of the casual audience. *Hell Bent* thrust the

show right back at the cult crowd whose bookshelves are lined with well-thumbed histories of the show's most arcane mythology (now refashioned by the Grand Moff) and who probably sat through this wordy, self-indulgent, self-important, ever-so-pleased-with-itself fanwank with a fresh supply of pants at their side ready for the next continuity reference (ooh, look, the original TARDIS control room!!) designed to encourage them to lose control of their bladders.

Doctor Who is back in the domain of the fans now – the earnest fans who really care about all the convoluted guff that the brilliant Russell T Davies, in his genius, swept aside as he reinvented the show to huge acclaim and massive audiences this dreary dirge can only dream of, back in 2005. It's no longer aimed at a Saturday night mainstream audience; this is Moffat playing squarely to the fan gallery – he wants their approbation and no-one else's. And, as I've stated before on more than one occasion (so often, in fact, that even I'm getting fed up with saying it now), he remains determined to trample across fifty years of the show's mythology to prove how clever he is by turning it on its head and inside out and into something else entirely. I'm not having it. As far as I'm concerned, the Doctor left Gallifrey all those years ago because he was tired of the Time Lords refusing to use their Great Power to help those in need and I won't accept nor recognise the bone-headed alternative he inflicted upon us in his desperately static series finale.

It's likely that we won't be seeing the Doctor again now until next Christmas. Thank God for that. I can't bring myself to look forward to it or 2017's Series Ten, even with the tiresome Clara having gone off on a Space/Time frolic of her own, because the same huge ego is sitting in the showrunner's chair, convinced the ratings have tumbled because of the inappropriate post-8pm timeslot and not because his stories are cold, unengaging rubbish. This is Moffat's **Who**; it's one big cosmic fairy-tale bereft of thrill, excitement

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or even anything much in the way of real incident and it's how it will remain under his apparently never-ending stewardship. Peter Capaldi and Peter Capaldi alone has saved Series Nine from being an absolute train wreck and it's a trick he'll probably have to pull again next time, as Moffat continues to fatally derail the show he professes to love with his own very peculiar brand of repetitive, dead-headed storytelling and history rewriting.

As for me, well, I'm done with the Doctor now. I can't bear any more of this sluggish, tedious, navel-gazing nonsense and, as someone who's been with the show since 1966 and who stuck with it through the dark dying days of the Sylvester McCoy years (which in retrospect, were works of inspired genius in comparison), it feels like a minor personal tragedy to have to write off a show that I really thought would be with me until my end of days. But I'm not prepared to endure any more of my (once) favourite show's grisly, ugly death throes and when the series returns, I won't be watching. Which, I suspect, will be nothing if not a mercy to patient readers of this column... ✦

Contact me via the magic of email at paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com or do the Twitter thing @PMount



DOCTOR WHO

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it's only a movie

a column by JORDAN ROYCE

Oh dear. I have had to endure a decade of worked up, ageing fan boys moaning that "George Lucas raped my childhood". Now I have to endure the overly sycophantic man crushes they all seem to have developed overnight for J. J. Abrams...

I have always maintained that I really found a lot to like with the *Star Wars* prequels, and found the hate for them quite misplaced, and more than a little over the top. I find it is equally hard to get swept along with this current ocular enhancement of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*.

Absolutely, *SWTFA* is a bloody fine entry in the series, but I can just see a few flaws that stop short of it being a classic like the original was back in 1977. To be honest, though, I would still rate this an 8 out of 10 movie, and much better than I could have hoped. My problems with the movie are equally the same problems that I have always had with J. J. Abrams as a filmmaker, but I am very happy that this movie has had the benefit of his genius level of casting ability. A talent that has landed this new trilogy with an instantly likeable bunch of characters that are a joy to watch on screen.

Whereas with the prequels, Lucas had been trying hard to expand the universe and mythology, the Mouse House have played it super safe. They were not in the market for risking the same mistakes, and have clearly opted to avoid any complexities that might slow down the experience, and have steered away from overt political intrigue. This *Star Wars* experience is black hats and white hats, no shades of grey. Even The First Order bad guys are merely a goose step and a swastika away from a very familiar iconic army. To a degree, this is a refreshing change, and allows the disaffected back on board, but it does not come without its limitations. Limitations that sometimes make the movie feel like *Star Wars* by focus group, as cliché after cliché are serviced at an almost breakneck pace.

SWTFA is a '70s hotrod with a modern volcano orange paintjob. A really great cover of a tune you can hum in your mind like second nature. A redux of the 1977 original in just about every possible way. Which sacrifices organic story telling in favour of a *Greatest Hits* approach.

Abrams is thankfully a master at pulling this off, as evidenced by his dumbed down but thrilling theme park ride adaptation of *Star Trek*. Yet as fun as this all is (and believe me I was grinning with the rest of you), I can't help but wonder how with an entire universe to explore, six movies of mythology, and two recent TV series, that we are here again with a squad of X-wing fighters attacking a planet-sized supergun, which needs a tiny ground force to make it vulnerable. Ironically, it is a part of *Star Wars* lore that the inclusion of a second Death Star by Lucas in *Return of the Jedi* was an unpopular choice with both Gary Kurtz and Lawrence Kasdan, making the appearance of this *Death Star Pro* in *SWTFA* quite a shock to me. Yet despite these frustrations, I had a great time watching this flick, and Abrams has left us with a fine new set of characters that feel just as 'Star Wars' as Han, Luke, Leia, and Vader did back in the day.

I would actually go so far as to say that I actually found the old cast distracting when they started to pop up (I know... sacrilege, right?). I was just engrossed with the instant star that is Daisy Ridley and her charismatic Rey, and loved the way everyone started to simply drift into the narrative. John Boyega as Finn is another character you just root for, along with the charm offensive that is Oscar Isaac as Poe Dameron. Even after pretty much writing off BB-8 as an annoyance in the trailers, dammit if the little fella doesn't win me over with his cheeky thumbs up - I must be going soft.

Obviously being of a certain age, it was great to see the old guard again, but it really is a testament to the new talent and characterisations that I saw them almost as a distraction. Although the older Han Solo still riffing off Chewie was a nice family visit.

The bad guys were basically *OK* this time around, and maybe this supposed *Les Miserables* quest for Phasma to bring in Finn could be an interesting feud to



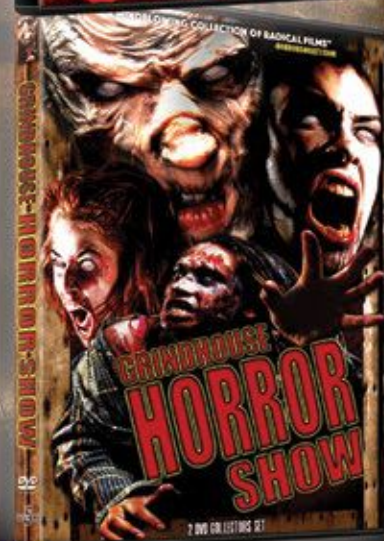
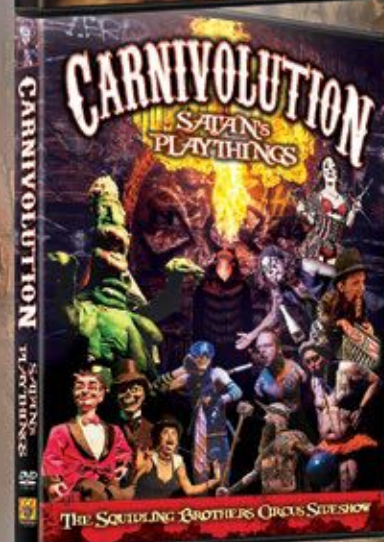
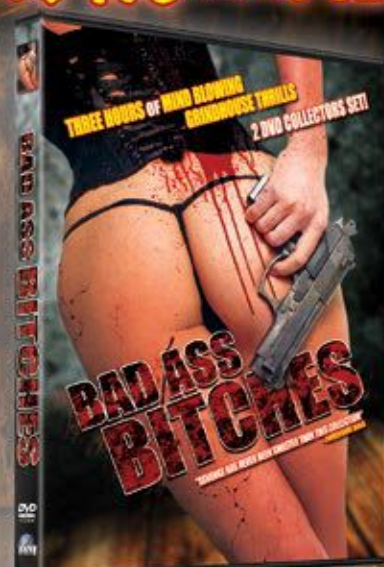
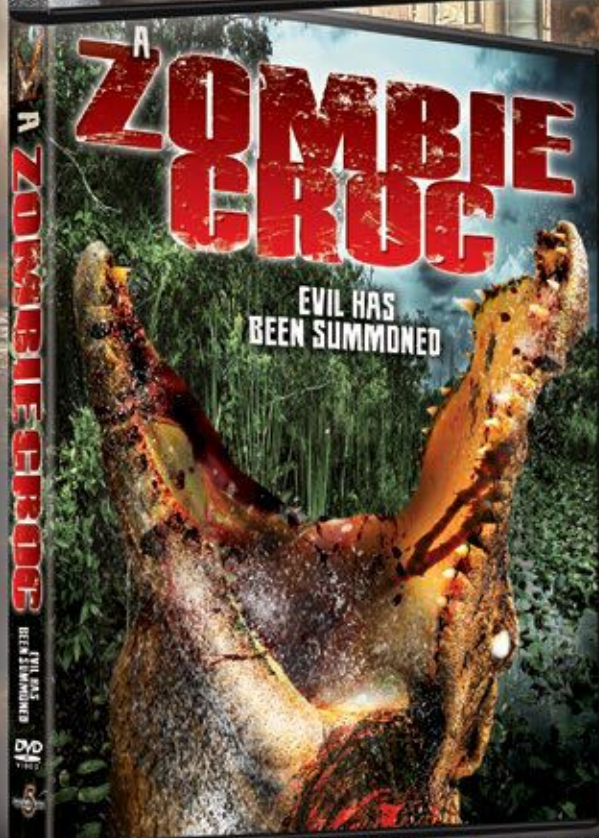
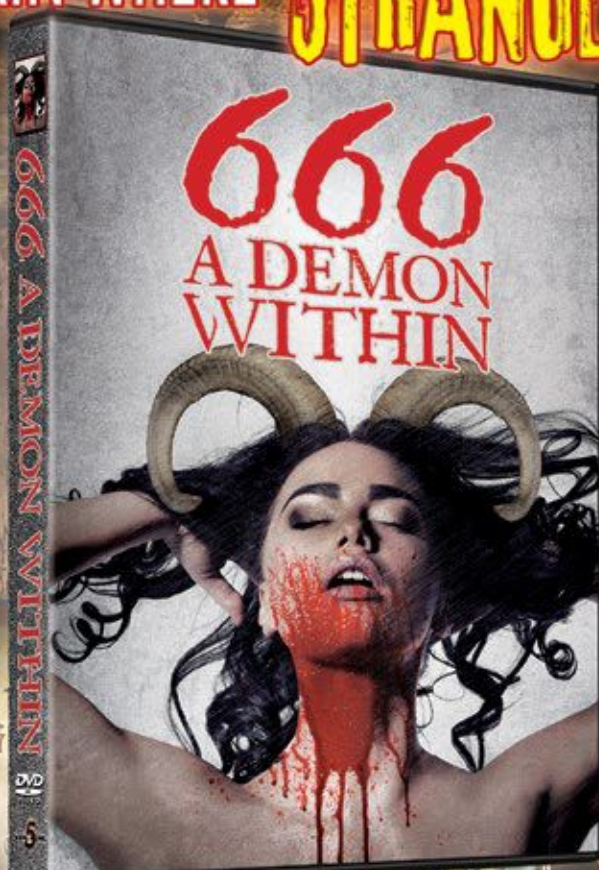
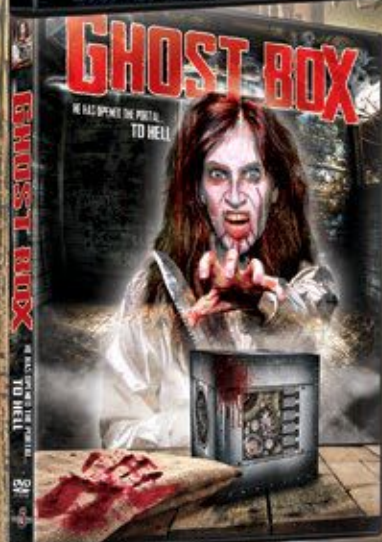
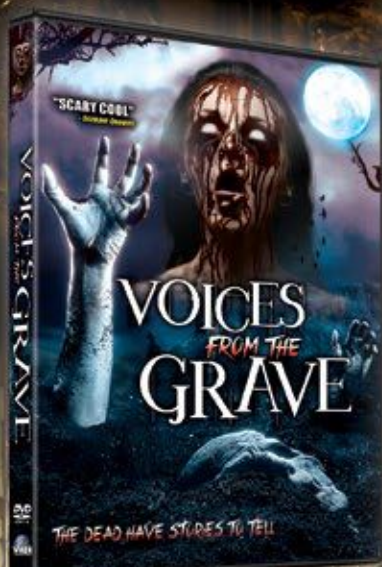
The Mouse House - Bringing the cute back to Star Wars

catch up with next time. It's also way too early to tell what is going on with prequel-esque boss man Snoke, leaving main menacing duties to fall upon Adam Driver as the ball of barely contained fury that is Kylo Ren. It has to be said that Driver infused what could have been a 2D Vader knock off with an incendiary burn. He was great in this role, and it is actually in the moments without the helmet that he literally sizzles with sparks of conflict and turmoil. Vader had the iconic look but there is genuinely *something* about Adam Driver in this role that is great to watch on screen (although I find his reactions to poor tidings uncannily familiar to some scenes in the *STARBURST* offices when someone catches me with bad news at the wrong time!). Given the character's tragic backstory and the unexplored Knights of Ren, this could be an interesting journey.

So here we are. Uncle George has passed on the torch, given most of his money away to worthy causes, and left us with a premier fantasy universe, *Industrial Light and Magic*, *THX*, *Skywalker Sound*, and much more. J. J. has added to this by constructing a great new cast of characters, and a fun reintroduction for those that had drifted away from *Star Wars*. I may not totally share the slightly blinkered adoration for *SWTFA*, but man, am I excited to see the next one... ✦

Jordan Royce can be contacted at jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com and hosts the STARBURST Radio Show every Wednesday 9pm until 11pm GMT on Fab Radio International – www.fabradiointernational.com also available from iTunes as a Podcast

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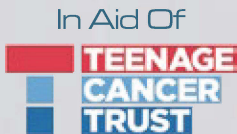
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